Edward Gibbon

BY

JAMES C. MORISON

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English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

Gibbon

by

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"THE SERVICE OF MAN, AN ESSAY TOWARDS THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE" ETC.

English Men of Letters

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JOHN MORLEY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

GIBBON'S EARLY LIFE UP TO THE TIME OF HIS LEAVING OXFORD 1

CHAPTER II.

AT LAUSANNE 19

CHAPTER III.

IN THE MILITIA 33

CHAPTER IV.

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY 47

CHAPTER V.

LITERARY SCHEMES.—THE HISTORY OF SWITZERLAND.—DISSERTATION ON THE SIXTH ÆNEID.—FATHER'S DEATH.—SETTLEMENT IN LONDON 58

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

LIFE IN LONDON.—PARLIAMENT.—THE BOARD OF TRADE.—THE DECLINE AND FALL.—MIGRATION TO LAUSANNE 69

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL 95

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE AT LAUSANNE . . 135

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL 144

CHAPTER X.

LAST ILLNESS.—DEATH.—CONCLUSION 169

GIBBON

CHAPTER I.

GIBBON'S EARLY LIFE UP TO THE TIME OF HIS LEAVING OXFORD.

EDWARD GIBBON[1] was born at Putney, near London, on 27th April in the year 1737. After the reformation of the calendar his birthday became the 8th of May. He was the eldest of a family of seven children; but his five brothers and only sister all died in early infancy, and he could remember in after life his sister alone, whom he also regretted.

He is at some pains in his Memoirs to show the length and quality of his pedigree, which he traces back to the times of the Second and Third Edwards. Noting the fact, we pass on to a nearer ancestor, his grand-

[1] Gibbon's Memoirs and Letters are of such easy access that I have not deemed it necessary to encumber these pages with references to them. Any one who wishes to control my statements will have no difficulty in doing so with the Miscellaneous Works, edited by Lord Sheffield, in his hand. Whenever I advance anything that seems to require corroboration, I have been careful to give my authority.

father, who seems to have been a person of considerable energy of character and business talent. He made a large fortune, which he lost in the South Sea Scheme, and then made another before his death. He was one of the Commissioners of Customs, and sat at the Board with the poet Prior; Bolingbroke was heard to declare that no man knew better than Mr. Edward Gibbon the commerce and finances of England. His son, the historian's father, was a person of very inferior stamp. He was educated at Westminster and Cambridge, travelled on the Continent, sat in Parliament, lived beyond his means as a country gentleman, and here his achievements came to an end. He seems to have been a kindly but a weak and impulsive man, who however had the merit of obtaining and deserving his son's affection by genial sympathy and kindly treatment.

Gibbon's childhood was passed in chronic illness, debility, and disease. All attempts to give him a regular education were frustrated by his precarious health. The longest period he ever passed at school were two years at Westminster, but he was constantly moved from one school to another. This even his delicacy can hardly explain, and it must have been fatal to all sustained study. Two facts he mentions of his school life, which paint the manners of the age. In the year 1746 such was the strength of party spirit that he, a child of nine years of age, "was reviled and buffeted for the sins of his Tory ancestors." Secondly, the worthy pedagogues of that day found no readier way of leading the most studious of boys to a love of science than corporal punishment. "At the expense of many tears and some blood I purchased the knowledge of the Latin syntax." Whether all love of study would

have been flogged out of him if he had remained at school, it is difficult to say, but it is not an improbable supposition that this would have happened. The risk was removed by his complete failure of health. "A strange nervous affection, which alternately contracted his legs and produced, without any visible symptom, the most excruciating pain," was his chief affliction, followed by intervals of languor and debility. The saving of his life during these dangerous years Gibbon unhesitatingly ascribes to the more than maternal care of his aunt, Catherine Porten, on writing whose name for the first time in his Memoirs, "he felt a tear of gratitude trickling down his cheek." "If there be any," he continues, "as I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman they must hold themselves indebted. Many anxious and solitary hours and days did she consume in the patient trial of relief and amusement; many wakeful nights did she sit by my bedside in trembling expectation that every hour would be my last." Gibbon is rather anxious to get over these details, and declares he has no wish to expatiate on a "disgusting topic." This is quite in the style of the *ancien régime*. There was no blame attached to any one for being ill in those days, but people were expected to keep their infirmities to themselves. "People knew how to live and die in those days, and kept their infirmities out of sight. You might have the gout, but you must walk about all the same without making grimaces. It was a point of good breeding to hide one's sufferings."[1] Similarly Walpole was much offended by a too faithful publication of Madame de Sévigné's *Letters*. "Heaven

[1] George Sand, quoted in Taine's *Ancien Régime*, p. 181.

forbid," he says, "that I should say that the letters of Madame de Sévigné were bad. I only meant that they were full of family details and mortal distempers, to which the most immortal of us are subject." But Gibbon was above all things a veracious historian, and fortunately has not refrained from giving us a truthful picture of his childhood.

Of his studies, or rather his reading—his early and invincible love of reading, which he would not exchange for the treasures of India—he gives us a full account, and we notice at once the interesting fact that a considerable portion of the historical field afterwards occupied by his great work had been already gone over by Gibbon before he was well in his teens. "My indiscriminate appetite subsided by degrees into the historic line, and since philosophy has exploded all innate ideas and natural propensities, I must ascribe the choice to the assiduous perusal of the *Universal History* as the octavo volumes successively appeared. This unequal work referred and introduced me to the Greek and Roman historians, to as many at least as were accessible to an English reader. All that I could find were greedily devoured, from Littlebury's lame *Herodotus* to Spelman's valuable *Xenophon*, to the pompous folios of Gordon's *Tacitus*, and a ragged *Procopius* of the beginning of the last century." Referring to an accident which threw the continuation of Echard's *Roman History* in his way, he says. "To me the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new, and I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube, when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. . . . I procured the second and

third volumes of Howell's *History of the World*, which exhibit the Byzantine period on a larger scale. Mahomet and his Saracens soon fixed my attention, and some instinct of criticism directed me to the genuine sources. Simon Ockley first opened my eyes, and I was led from one book to another till I had ranged round the circle of Oriental history. Before I was sixteen I had exhausted all that could be learned in English of the Arabs and Persians, the Tartars and Turks, and the same ardour urged me to guess at the French of D'Herbelot and to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's *Abulfaragius*." Here is in rough outline a large portion at least of the *Decline and Fall* already surveyed. The fact shows how deep was the sympathy that Gibbon had for his subject, and that there was a sort of pre-established harmony between his mind and the historical period he afterwards illustrated.

Up to the age of fourteen it seemed that Gibbon, as he says, was destined to remain through life an illiterate cripple. But as he approached his sixteenth year, a great change took place in his constitution, and his diseases, instead of growing with his growth and strengthening with his strength, wonderfully vanished. This unexpected recovery was not seized by his father in a rational spirit, as affording a welcome opportunity of repairing the defects of a hitherto imperfect education. Instead of using the occasion thus presented of recovering some of the precious time lost, of laying a sound foundation of scholarship and learning on which a superstructure at the university or elsewhere could be ultimately built, he carried the lad off in an impulse of perplexity and impatience, and entered him as a gentleman commoner at Magdalen College just before he

had completed his fifteenth year (1752, April 3). This was perhaps the most unwise step he could have taken under the circumstances. Gibbon was too young and too ignorant to profit by the advantages offered by Oxford to a more mature student, and his status as a gentleman commoner seemed intended to class him among the idle and dissipated who are only expected to waste their money and their time. A good education is generally considered as reflecting no small credit on its possessor; but in the majority of cases it reflects credit on the wise solicitude of his parents or guardians rather than on himself. If Gibbon escaped the peril of being an ignorant and frivolous lounger, the merit was his own.

At no period in their history had the English universities sunk to a lower condition as places of education than at the time when Gibbon went up to Oxford. To speak of them as seats of learning seems like irony; they were seats of nothing but coarse living and clownish manners, the centres where all the faction, party spirit, and bigotry of the country were gathered to a head. In this evil pre eminence both of the universities and all the colleges appear to have been upon a level, though Lincoln College, Oxford, is mentioned as a bright exception in John Wesley's day to the prevalent degeneracy. The strange thing is that, with all their neglect of learning and morality, the colleges were not the resorts of jovial if unseemly boon companionship: they were collections of quarrelsome and spiteful litigants, who spent their time in angry lawsuits. The indecent contentions between Bentley and the Fellows of Trinity were no isolated scandal. They are best known and remembered on account of the eminence of the chief disputants, and of the melancholy waste of Bentley's

genius which they occasioned. Hearne writes of Oxford in 1726, "There are such differences now in the University of Oxford (hardly one college but where all the members are busied in law business and quarrels not at all relating to the promotion of learning), that good letters decay every day, insomuch that this ordination on Trinity Sunday at Oxford there were no fewer (as I am informed) than fifteen denied orders for insufficiency, which is the more to be noted because our bishops, and those employed by them, are themselves illiterate men."[1] The state of things had not much improved twenty or thirty years later when Gibbon went up, but perhaps it had improved a little. He does not mention lawsuits as a favourite pastime of the Fellows. "The Fellows or monks of my time," he says, "were decent, easy men, who supinely enjoyed the gifts of the founder: their days were filled by a series of uniform employments—the chapel, the hall, the coffee-house, and the common room—till they retired weary and well satisfied to a long slumber. From the toil of reading, writing, or thinking they had absolved their consciences. Their conversation stagnated in a round of college business, Tory politics, personal anecdotes, and private scandal. Their dull and deep potations excused the brisk intemperance of youth, and their constitutional toasts were not expressive of the most lively loyalty to the House of Hanover." Some Oxonians perhaps could still partly realise the truth of this original picture by their recollections of faint and feeble copies of it drawn from their experience in youthful days. It seems to be certain that the universities, far from setting a model of

[1] *Social Life at the English Universities.* By Christopher Wordsworth. Page 57.

good living, were really below the average standard of the morals and manners of the age, and the standard was not high. Such a satire as the *Terræ Filius* of Amhurst cannot be accepted without large deductions; but the caricaturist is compelled by the conditions of his craft to aim at the *true seeming*, if he neglects the true, and with the benefit of this limitation the *Terræ Filius* reveals a deplorable and revolting picture of vulgarity, insolence, and licence. The universities are spoken of in terms of disparagement by men of all classes. Lord Chesterfield speaks of the "rust" of Cambridge as something of which a polished man should promptly rid himself. Adam Smith showed his sense of the defects of Oxford in a stern section of the *Wealth of Nations*, written twenty years after he had left the place. Even youths like Gray and West, fresh from Eton, express themselves with contempt for their respective universities. "Consider me," says the latter, writing from Christ Church, "very seriously, here is a strange country, inhabited by things that call themselves Doctors and Masters of Arts, a country flowing with syllogisms and ale; where Horace and Virgil are equally unknown." Gray, answering from Peterhouse, can only do justice to his feelings by quoting the words of the Hebrew prophet, and insists that Isaiah had Cambridge equally with Babylon in view when he spoke of the wild beasts and wild asses, of the satyrs that dance, of an inhabitation of dragons and a court for owls.

Into such untoward company was Gibbon thrust by his careless father at the age of fifteen. That he succumbed to the unwholesome atmosphere cannot surprise us. He does not conceal, perhaps he rather exaggerates,

in his Memoirs, the depth of his fall. As Bunyan in a state of grace accused himself of dreadful sins which in all likelihood he never committed, so it is probable that Gibbon, in his old age, when study and learning were the only passions he knew, reflected with too much severity on the boyish freaks of his university life. Moreover there appears to have been nothing coarse or unworthy in his dissipation; he was simply idle. He justly lays much of the blame on the authorities. To say that the discipline was lax would be to pay it an unmerited compliment. There was no discipline at all. He lived in Magdalen as he might have lived at the Angel or the Mitre Tavern. He not only left his college, but he left the university, whenever he liked. In one winter he made a tour to Bath, another to Buckinghamshire, and he made four excursions to London, "without once hearing the voice of admonition, without once feeling the hand of control." Of study he had just as much and as little as he pleased.

"As soon as my tutor had sounded the insufficiency of his disciple in school learning, he proposed that we should read every morning from ten to eleven the comedies of Terence. During the first weeks I constantly attended these lessons in my tutor's room; but as they appeared equally devoid of profit and pleasure, I was once tempted to try the experiment of a formal apology. The apology was accepted with a smile. I repeated the offence with less ceremony: the excuse was admitted with the same indulgence; the slightest motive of laziness or indisposition, the most trifling avocation at home or abroad was allowed as a worthy impediment, nor did my tutor appear conscious of my absence or

neglect." No wonder he spoke with indignation of such scandalous neglect. "To the University of Oxford," he says, "I acknowledge no obligation, and she will as readily renounce me for a son, as I am willing to disclaim her for a mother. I spent fourteen months at Magdalen College; they proved the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life. The reader will pronounce between the school and the scholar." This is only just and fully merited by the abuses denounced. One appreciates the anguish of the true scholar mourning over lost time as a miser over lost gold. There was another side of the question which naturally did not occur to Gibbon, but which may properly occur to us. Did Gibbon lose as much as he thought in missing the scholastic drill of the regular public school and university man? Something he undoubtedly lost: he was never a finished scholar, up to the standard even of his own day. If he had been, is it certain that the accomplishment would have been all gain? It may be doubted. At a later period Gibbon read the classics with the free and eager curiosity of a thoughtful mind. It was a labour of love, of passionate ardour, similar to the manly zeal of the great scholars of the Renaissance. This appetite had not been blunted by enforced toil in a prescribed groove. How much of that zest for antiquity, of that keen relish for the classic writers which he afterwards acquired and retained through life, might have been quenched if he had first made their acquaintance as school-books? Above all, would he have looked on the ancient world with such freedom and originality as he afterwards gained, if he had worn through youth the harness of academical study? These questions do not suggest an answer, but they may furnish a doubt.

Oxford and Cambridge for nearly a century have been turning out crowds of thorough-paced scholars of the orthodox pattern. It is odd that the two greatest historians who have been scholars as well—Gibbon and Grote—were not university-bred men.

As if to prove by experiment where the fault lay, in "the school or the scholar," Gibbon had no sooner left Oxford for the long vacation, than his taste for study returned, and, not content with reading, he attempted original composition. The subject he selected was a curious one for a youth in his sixteenth year. It was an attempt to settle the chronology of the age of Sesostris, and shows how soon the austere side of history had attracted his attention. "In my childish balance," he says, "I presumed to weigh the systems of Scaliger and Petavius, of Marsham and of Newton; and my sleep has been disturbed by the difficulty of reconciling the Septuagint with the Hebrew computation." Of course his essay had the usual value of such juvenile productions; that is, none at all, except as an indication of early bias to serious study of history. On his return to Oxford, the age of Sesostris was wisely relinquished. He indeed soon commenced a line of study which was destined to have a lasting influence on the remainder of his course through life.

He had an inborn taste for theology and the controversies which have arisen concerning religious dogma. "From my childhood," he says, "I had been fond of religious disputation: my poor aunt has often been puzzled by the mysteries which she strove to believe." How he carried the taste into mature life, his great chapters on the heresies and controversies of the Early Church are there to show. This inclination for

theology, co-existing with a very different temper towards religious sentiment, recalls the similar case of the author of the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, the illustrious Pierre Bayle, whom Gibbon resembled in more ways than one. At Oxford his religous education, like everything else connected with culture, had been entirely neglected. It seems hardly credible, yet we have his word for it, that he never subscribed or studied the Articles of the Church of England, and was never confirmed. When he first went up, he was judged to be too young, but the Vice-Chancellor directed him to return as soon as he had completed his fifteenth year, recommending him in the meantime to the instruction of his college. "My college forgot to instruct; I forgot to return, and was myself forgotten by the first magistrate of the university. Without a single lecture, either public or private, either Christian or Protestant, without any academical subscription, without any episcopal ordination, I was left by light of my catechism to grope my way to the chapel and communion table, where I was admitted without question how far or by what means I might be qualified to receive the sacrament. Such almost incredible neglect was productive of the worst mischiefs." What did Gibbon mean by this last sentence? Did he, when he wrote it, towards the end of his life, regret the want of early religious instruction? Nothing leads us to think so, or to suppose that his subsequent loss of faith was a heavy grief, supported, but painful to bear. His mind was by nature positive, or even pagan, and he had nothing of what the Germans call *religiosität* in him. Still there is a passage in his Memoirs where he oddly enough laments not having selected the *fat*

slumbers of the Church as an eligible profession. Did he reflect that perhaps the neglect of his religious education at Oxford had deprived him of a bishopric or a good deanery, and the learned leisure which such positions at that time conferred on those who cared for it? He could not feel that he was morally, or even spiritually, unfit for an office filled in his own time by such men as Warburton and Hurd. He would not have disgraced the episcopal bench; he would have been dignified, courteous, and hospitable; a patron and promoter of learning, we may be sure. His literary labours would probably have consisted of an edition of a Greek play or two, and certainly some treatise on the Evidences of Christianity. But in that case we should not have had the *Decline and Fall.*

The "blind activity of idleness" to which he was exposed at Oxford, prevented any result of this kind. For want of anything better to do, he was led to read Middleton's *Free Enquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are Supposed to have Subsisted in the Christian Church.* Gibbon says that the effect of Middleton's "bold criticism" upon him was singular, and that instead of making him a sceptic, it made him more of a believer. He might have reflected that it is the commonest of occurrences for controversialists to produce exactly the opposite result to that which they intend, and that as many an apology for Christianity has sown the first seeds of infidelity, so an attack upon it might well intensify faith. What follows is very curious. "The elegance of style and freedom of argument were repelled by a shield of prejudice. I still revered the character, or rather the names of the saints and fathers whom Dr. Middleton exposes; nor could he

destroy my implicit belief that the gift of miraculous powers was continued in the Church during the first four or five centuries of Christianity. But I was unable to resist the weight of historical evidence, that within the same period most of the leading doctrines of Popery were already introduced in theory and practice. Nor was my conclusion absurd that miracles are the test of truth, and that the Church must be orthodox and pure which was so often approved by the visible interposition of the Deity. The marvellous tales which are boldly attested by the Basils and Chrysostoms, the Austins and Jeromes, compelled me to embrace the superior merits of celibacy, the institution of the monastic life, the use of the sign of the cross, of holy oil, and even of images, the invocation of saints, the worship of relics, the rudiments of purgatory in prayers for the dead, and the tremendous mystery of the sacrifice of the body and the blood of Christ, which insensibly swelled into the prodigy of transubstantiation." In this remarkable passage we have a distinct foreshadow of the Tractarian movement, which came seventy or eighty years afterwards. Gibbon in 1752, at the age of fifteen, took up a position practically the same as Froude and Newman took up about the year 1830. In other words, he reached the famous *via media* at a bound. But a second spring soon carried him clear of it, into the bosom of the Church of Rome.

He had come to what are now called Church principles, by the energy of his own mind working on the scanty data furnished him by Middleton. By one of those accidents which usually happen in such cases, he made the acquaintance of a young gentleman who had already embraced Catholicism, and who was well

provided with controversial tracts in favour of Romanism. Among these were the two works of Bossuet, the *Exposition of Catholic Doctrine* and the *History of the Protestant Variations*. Gibbon says: "I read, I applauded, I believed, and surely I fell by a noble hand. I have since examined the originals with a more discerning eye, and shall not hesitate to pronounce that Bossuet is indeed a master of all the weapons of controversy. In the *Exposition*, a specious apology, the orator assumes with consummate art the tone of candour and simplicity, and the ten-horned monster is transformed at his magic touch into the milk-white hind, who must be loved as soon as she is seen. In the *History*, a bold and well-aimed attack, he displays, with a happy mixture of narrative and argument, the faults and follies, the changes and contradictions of our first Reformers, whose variations, as he dexterously contends, are the mark of historical error, while the perpetual unity of the Catholic Church is the sign and test of infallible truth. To my present feelings it seems incredible that I should ever believe that I believed in transubstantiation. But my conqueror oppressed me with the sacramental words, '*Hoc est corpus meum*,' and dashed against each other the figurative half meanings of the Protestant sects; every objection was resolved into omnipotence, and, after repeating at St. Mary's the Athanasian Creed, I humbly acquiesced in the mystery of the Real Presence."

Many reflections are suggested on the respective domains of reason and faith by these words, but they cannot be enlarged on here. No one, nowadays, one may hope, would think of making Gibbon's conversion a subject of reproach to him. The danger is rather that

it should be regarded with too much honour. It unquestionably shows the early and trenchant force of his intellect: he mastered the logical position in a moment; saw the necessity of a criterion of faith; and being told that it was to be found in the practice of antiquity, boldly went there, and abided by the result. But this praise to his head does not extend to his heart. A more tender and deep moral nature would not have moved so rapidly. We must in fairness remember that it was not his fault that his religious education had been neglected at home, at school, and at college. But we have no reason to think that had it been attended to, the result would have been much otherwise. The root of spiritual life did not exist in him. It never withered, because it never shot up. Thus when he applied his acute mind to a religious problem, he contemplated it with the coolness and impartiality of a geometer or chess player, his intellect operated *in vacuo* so to speak, untrammelled by any bias of sentiment or early training. He had no profound associations to tear out of his heart. He merely altered the premisses of a syllogism. When Catholicism was presented to him in a logical form, it met with no inward bar and repugnance. The house was empty and ready for a new guest, or rather the first guest. If Gibbon anticipated the Tractarian movement intellectually, he was farther removed than the poles are asunder from the mystic reverent spirit which inspired that movement. If we read the *Apologia* of Dr. Newman, we perceive the likeness and unlikeness of the two cases. "As a matter of simple conscience," says the latter, "I felt it to be a duty to protest against the Church of Rome." At the time he refers to Dr. Newman was a Catholic to a degree Gibbon never

dreamed of. But in the one case conscience and heart-ties "strong as life, stronger almost than death," arrested the conclusions of the intellect. Ground which Gibbon dashed over in a few months or weeks, the great Tractarian took ten years to traverse. So different is the mystic from the positive mind.

Gibbon had no sooner settled his new religion than he resolved with a frankness which did him all honour to profess it publicly. He wrote to his father, announcing his conversion, a letter which he afterwards described, when his sentiments had undergone a complete change, as written with all the pomp, dignity, and self-satisfaction of a martyr. A momentary glow of enthusiasm had raised him, as he said, above all worldly considerations. He had no difficulty, in an excursion to London, in finding a priest, who perceived in the first interview that persuasion was needless. "After sounding the motives and merits of my conversion, he consented to admit me into the pale of the Church, and at his feet on the 8th of June 1753, I solemnly, though privately, abjured the errors of heresy." He was exactly fifteen years and one month old. Further details, which one would like to have, he does not give. The scene even of the solemn act is not mentioned, nor whether he was baptized again; but this may be taken for granted.

The fact of any one "going over to Rome" is too common an occurrence nowadays to attract notice. But in the eighteenth century it was a rare and startling phenomenon. Gibbon's father, who was "neither a bigot nor a philosopher," was shocked and astonished by his "son's strange departure from the religion of his

country." He divulged the secret of young Gibbon's conversion, and "the gates of Magdalen College were for ever shut" against the latter's return. They really needed no shutting at all. By the fact of his conversion to Romanism he had ceased to be a member of the University.

CHAPTER II.

AT LAUSANNE.

The elder Gibbon showed a decision of character and prompt energy in dealing with his son's conversion to Romanism, which were by no means habitual with him. He swiftly determined to send him out of the country, far away from the influences and connections which had done such harm. Lausanne in Switzerland was the place selected for his exile, in which it was resolved he should spend some years in wholesome reflections on the error he had committed in yielding to the fascinations of Roman Catholic polemics. No time was lost: Gibbon had been received into the Church on the 8th of June, 1753, and on the 30th of the same month he had reached his destination. He was placed under the care of a M. Pavillard, a Calvinist minister, who had two duties laid upon him, a general one, to superintend the young man's studies, a particular and more urgent one, to bring him back to the Protestant faith.

It was a severe trial which Gibbon had now to undergo. He was by nature shy and retiring; he was ignorant of French; he was very young; and with these disadvantages he was thrown among entire strangers alone. After the excitement and novelty of foreign travel were

over, and he could realise his position, he felt his heart sink within him. From the luxury and freedom of Oxford he was degraded to the dependence of a schoolboy. Pavillard managed his expenses, and his supply of pocket-money was reduced to a small monthly allowance. "I had exchanged," he says, "my elegant apartment in Magdalen College for a narrow gloomy street, the most unfrequented in an unhandsome town, for an old inconvenient house, and for a small chamber ill-contrived and ill-furnished, which on the approach of winter, instead of a companionable fire, must be warmed by the dull and invisible heat of a stove." Under these gloomy auspices he began the most profitable, and after a time the most pleasant, period of his whole life, one on which he never ceased to look back with unmingled satisfaction as the starting-point of his studies and intellectual progress.

The first care of his preceptor was to bring about his religious conversion. Gibbon showed an honourable tenacity to his new faith, and a whole year after he had been exposed to the Protestant dialectics of Pavillard he still, as the latter observed with much regret, continued to abstain from meat on Fridays. There is something slightly incongruous in the idea of Gibbon *fasting* out of religious scruples, but the fact shows that his religion had obtained no slight hold of him, and that although he had embraced it quickly, he also accepted with intrepid frankness all its consequences. His was not an intellect that could endure half measures and half lights: he did not belong to that class of persons who do not know their own minds.

However it is not surprising that his religion, placed where he was, was slowly but steadily undermined. The

Swiss clergy, he says, were acute and learned on the topics of controversy, and Pavillard seems to have been a good specimen of his class. An adult and able man, in daily contact with a youth in his own house, urging persistently but with tact one side of a thesis, could hardly fail in the course of time to carry his point. But though Gibbon is willing to allow his tutor a handsome share in the work of his conversion, he maintains that it was chiefly effected by his own private reflections. And this is eminently probable. What logic had set up, logic could throw down. He gives us a highly characteristic example of the reflections in question. "I still remember my solitary transport at the discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation: that the text of Scripture which seems to inculcate the Real Presence is attested only by a single sense—our sight; while the real presence itself is disproved by three of our senses—the sight, the touch, and the taste." He was unaware of the distinction between the logical understanding and the higher reason, which has been made since his time to the great comfort of thinkers of a certain stamp. Having reached so far, his progress was easy and rapid. "The various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream, and after a full conviction, on Christmas-day, 1754, I received the sacrament in the church of Lausanne. It was here that I suspended my religious inquiries, acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants." He thus had been a Catholic for about eighteen months.

Gibbon's residence at Lausanne was a memorable epoch in his life on two grounds. Firstly, it was during the five years he spent there that he laid the founda-

tions of that deep and extensive learning by which he was afterwards distinguished. Secondly, the foreign education he there received, at the critical period when the youth passes into the man, gave a permanent bent to his mind, and made him a continental European rather than an insular Englishman—two highly important factors in his intellectual growth.

He says that he went up to Oxford with a "stock of erudition which might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy might have been ashamed." Both erudition and ignorance were left pretty well undisturbed during his short and ill-starred university career. At Lausanne he found himself, for the first time, in possession of the means of successful study, good health, calm, books, and tuition, up to a certain point: that point did not reach very far. The good Pavillard, an excellent man, for whom Gibbon ever entertained a sincere regard, was quite unequal to the task of forming such a mind. There is no evidence that he was a ripe or even a fair scholar, and the plain fact is that Gibbon belongs to the honourable band of self-taught men. "My tutor," says Gibbon, "had the good sense to discern how far he could be useful, and when he felt that I advanced beyond his speed and measure, he wisely left me to my genius." Under that good guidance he formed an extensive plan of reviewing the Latin classics, in the four divisions of (1) Historians, (2) Poets, (3) Orators, and (4) Philosophers, in "chronological series from the days of Plautus and Sallust to the decline of the language and empire of Rome." In one year he read over the following authors: Virgil, Sallust, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Valerius Maximus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Quintus Curtius, Justin, Florus, Plautus, Terence,

and Lucretius. We may take his word when he says that this review, however rapid, was neither hasty nor superficial. Gibbon had the root of all scholarship in him, the most diligent accuracy and an unlimited faculty of taking pains. But he was a great scholar, not a minute one, and belonged to the robust race of the Scaligers and the Bentleys, rather than to the smaller breed of the Elmsleys and Monks, and of course he was at no time a professed philologer, occupied chiefly with the niceties of language. The point which deserves notice in this account of his studies is their wide sweep, so superior and bracing, as compared with that narrow restriction to the "authors of the best period," patronised by teachers who imperfectly comprehend their own business. Gibbon proceeded on the common-sense principle, that if you want to obtain a real grasp of the literature, history, and genius of a people, you must master that literature with more or less completeness from end to end, and that to select arbitrarily the authors of a short period on the grounds that they are models of style, is nothing short of foolish. It was the principle on which Joseph Scaliger studied Greek, and indeed occurs spontaneously to a vigorous mind eager for real knowledge.[1]

Nor did he confine himself to reading: he felt that no one is sure of knowing a language who limits his study of it to the perusal of authors. He practised diligently Latin prose composition, and this in the simplest and

[1] Vix delibatis conjugationibus Græcis, Homerum cum interpretatione arreptum uno et viginti diebus totum didici. Reliquos vero poetas Græcos omnes intra quatuor menses devoravi. Neque ullum oratorem aut historicum prius attigi quam poetas omnes tenerem.—*Scaligeri Epistolæ. Lib.* I. *Epis.* 1.

most effectual way. "I translated an epistle of Cicero into French, and after throwing it aside till the words and phrases were obliterated from my memory, I re-translated my French into such Latin as I could find, and then compared each sentence of my imperfect version with the ease, the grace, the propriety of the Roman orator." The only odd thing in connection with this excellent method is that Gibbon in his Memoirs seems to think it was a novel discovery of his own, and would recommend it to the imitation of students, whereas it is as old as the days of Ascham at least. There is no indication that he ever in the least degree attempted Latin verse, and it is improbable that he should have done so, reading alone in Lausanne, under the slight supervision of such a teacher as Pavillard. The lack of this elegant frivolity will be less thought of now than it would some years ago. But we may admit that it would have been interesting to have a copy of hexameters or elegiacs by the historian of Rome. So much for Latin. In Greek he made far less progress. He had attained his nineteenth year before he learned the alphabet, and even after so late a beginning he did not prosecute the study with much energy.

M. Pavillard seems to have taught him little more than the rudiments. "After my tutor had left me to myself I worked my way through about half the *Iliad*, and afterwards interpreted alone a large portion of Xenophon and Herodotus. But my ardour, destitute of aid and emulation, gradually cooled, and from the barren task of searching words in a lexicon I withdrew to the free and familiar conversation of Virgil and Tacitus." This statement of the Memoirs is more than confirmed by the journal of his studies, where we find him, as late as the

year 1762, when he was twenty-five years of age, painfully reading Homer, it would appear, for the first time. He read on an average about a book a week, and when he had finished the *Iliad* this is what he says: "I have so far met with the success I hoped for, that I have acquired a great facility in reading the language, and treasured up a very great stock of words. What I have rather neglected is the grammatical construction of them, and especially the many various inflections of the verbs." To repair this defect he wisely resolved to bestow some time every morning on the perusal of the Greek Grammar of Port Royal. Thus we see that at an age when many men are beginning to forget their Greek, Gibbon was beginning to learn it. Was this early deficiency ever repaired in Greek as it was in Latin? I think not. He never was at home in old Hellas as he was in old Rome. This may be inferred from the discursive notes of his great work, in which he has with admirable skill incorporated so much of his vast and miscellaneous reading. But his references to classic Greek authors are relatively few and timid compared with his grasp and mastery of the Latin. His judgments on Greek authors are also, to say the least, singular. When he had achieved the *Decline and Fall*, and was writing his Memoirs in the last years of his life, the Greek writer whom he selects for especial commendation is Xenophon. "Cicero in Latin and Xenophon in Greek are indeed the two ancients whom I would first propose to a liberal scholar, not only for the merit of their style and sentiments, but for the admirable lessons which may be applied almost to every situation of public and private life." Of the merit of Xenophon's sentiments, most people would now admit that the less said the better.

The warmth of Gibbon's language with regard to Xenophon contrasts with the coldness he shows with regard to Plato. "I involved myself," he says, "in the philosophic maze of the writings of Plato, of which perhaps the dramatic is more interesting than the argumentative part." That Gibbon knew amply sufficient Greek for his purposes as an historian no one doubts, but his honourable candour enables us to see that he was never a Greek scholar in the proper sense of the word.

It would be greatly to misknow Gibbon to suppose that his studies at Lausanne were restricted to the learned languages. He obtained something more than an elementary knowledge of mathematics, mastered De Crousaz' *Logic* and Locke's *Essay*, and filled up his spare time with that wide and discursive reading to which his boundless curiosity was always pushing him. He was thoroughly happy and contented, and never ceased throughout his life to congratulate himself on the fortunate exile which had placed him at Lausanne. In one respect he did not use his opportunities while in Switzerland. He never climbed a mountain all the time he was there, though he lived to see in his later life the first commencement of the Alpine fever. On the other hand, as became a historian and man of sense, the social and political aspects of the country engaged his attention, as well they might. He enjoyed access to the best society of the place, and the impression he made seems to have been as favourable as the one he received.

The influence of a foreign training is very marked in Gibbon, affecting as it does his general cast of thought, and even his style. It would be difficult to name any writer in our language, especially among the few who deserve to be compared with him, who is so un-English,

not in a bad sense of the word, as implying objectionable qualities, but as wanting the clear insular stamp and native flavour. If an intelligent Chinese or Persian were to read his book in a French translation, he would not readily guess that it was written by an Englishman. It really bears the imprint of no nationality, and is emphatically European. We may postpone the question whether this is a merit or a defect, but it is a characteristic. The result has certainly been that he is one of the best-known of English prose writers on the Continent, and one whom foreigners most readily comprehend. This peculiarity, of which he himself was fully aware, we may agree with him in ascribing to his residence at Lausanne. At the "flexible age of sixteen he soon learned to endure, and gradually to adopt," foreign manners. French became the language in which he spontaneously thought; "his views were enlarged, and his prejudices were corrected." In one particular he cannot be complimented on the effect of his continental education, when he congratulates himself "that his taste for the French theatre had abated his idolatry for the gigantic genius of Shakespeare, which is inculcated from our infancy as the first duty of Englishmen." Still it is well to be rid of idolatry and bigotry even with regard to Shakespeare. We must remember that the insular prejudices from which Gibbon rejoiced to be free were very different in their intensity and narrowness from anything of the kind which exists now. The mixed hatred and contempt for foreigners which prevailed in his day, were enough to excite disgust in any liberal mind.

The lucid order and admirable literary form of Gibbon's great work are qualities which can escape no

observant reader. But they are qualities which are not common in English books. The French have a saying, "Les Anglais ne savent pas faire un livre." This is unjust, taken absolutely, but as a general rule it is not without foundation. It is not a question of depth or originality of thought, nor of the various merits belonging to style properly so-called. In these respects English authors need not fear competition. But in the art of clear and logical arrangement, of building up a book in such order and method that each part contributes to the general effect of the whole, we must own that we have many lessons to learn of our neighbours. Now in this quality Gibbon is a Frenchman. Not Voltaire himself is more perspicuous than Gibbon. Everything is in its place, and disposed in such apparently natural sequence that the uninitiated are apt to think the matter could not have been managed otherwise. It is a case, if there ever was one, of consummate art concealing every trace, not only of art, but even of effort. Of course the grasp and penetrating insight which are implied here, were part of Gibbon's great endowment, which only Nature could give. But it was fortunate that his genius was educated in the best school for bringing out its innate quality.

It would be difficult to explain why, except on that principle of decimation by which Macaulay accounted for the outcry against Lord Byron, Gibbon's solitary and innocent love passage has been made the theme of a good deal of malicious comment. The parties most interested, and who, we may presume, knew the circumstances better than any one else, seem to have been quite satisfied with each other's conduct. Gibbon and Mdlle. Curchod, afterwards Madame Necker, remained on

terms of the *most* intimate friendship till the end of the former's life. This might be supposed sufficient. But it has not been so considered by evil tongues. The merits of the case, however, may be more conveniently discussed in a later chapter. At this point it will be enough to give the facts.

Mdlle. Susanne Curchod was born about the year 1740; her father was the Calvinist minister of Crassier, her mother a French Huguenot who had preferred her religion to her country. She had received a liberal and even learned education from her father, and was as attractive in person as she was accomplished in mind. "She was beautiful with that pure virginal beauty which depends on early youth" (Sainte-Beuve). In 1757 she was the talk of Lausanne, and could not appear in an assembly or at the play without being surrounded by admirers; she was called La Belle Curchod. Gibbon's curiosity was piqued to see such a prodigy, and he was smitten with love at first sight. "I found her" he says "learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners." He was twenty and she seventeen years of age; no impediment was placed in the way of their meeting; and he was a frequent guest in her father's house. In fact Gibbon paid his court with an assiduity which makes an exception in his usually unromantic nature. "She listened," he says, "to the voice of truth and passion, and I might presume to hope that I had made some impression on a virtuous heart." We must remember that this and other rather glowing passages in his Memoirs were written in his old age, when he had returned to Lausanne, and when, after a long separation and many vicissitudes, he and Madame Necker were again thrown

together in an intimacy of friendship which revived old memories. Letters of hers to him which will be quoted in a later chapter show this in a striking light. He indulged, he says, his dream of felicity, but on his return to England he soon discovered that his father would not hear of this "strange alliance," and then follows the sentence which has lost him in the eyes of some persons. "After a painful struggle I yielded to my fate: I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son." What else he was to do under the circumstances does not appear. He was wholly dependent on his father, and on the Continent at least parental authority is not regarded as a trifling impediment in such cases. Gibbon could only have married Mdlle. Curchod as an exile and a pauper, if he had openly withstood his father's wishes. "All for love" is a very pretty maxim, but it is apt to entail trouble when practically applied. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had the most beautiful sentiments on paper, but who in real life was not always a model of self-denial, found, as we shall see, grave fault with Gibbon's conduct. Gibbon, as a plain man of rather prosaic good sense, behaved neither heroically nor meanly. Time, absence, and the scenes of a new life, which he found in England, had their usual effect; his passion vanished. "My cure," he says, "was accelerated by a faithful report of the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the lady herself, and my love subsided in friendship and esteem." The probability, indeed, that he and Mdlle. Curchod would ever see each other again, must have seemed remote in the extreme. Europe and England were involved in the Seven Years War; he was fixed at home, and an officer in the militia; Switzerland was far off: when and where were they likely to meet?

They did, contrary to all expectation, meet again, and renewed terms not so much of friendship as of affection. Mdlle. Curchod, as the wife of Necker, became somewhat of a celebrity, and it is chiefly owing to these last-named circumstances that the world has ever heard of Gibbon's early love.

While he was at Lausanne Gibbon made the acquaintance of Voltaire, but it led to no intimacy or fruitful reminiscence. "He received me with civility as an English youth, but I cannot boast of any peculiar notice or distinction." Still he had "the satisfaction of hearing—an uncommon circumstance—a great poet declaim his own productions on the stage." One is often tempted, in reading Gibbon's Memoirs, to regret that he adopted the austere plan which led him "to condemn the practice of transforming a private memorial into a vehicle of satire or praise." As he truly says, "It was assuredly in his power to amuse the reader with a gallery of portraits and a collection of anecdotes." This reserve is particularly disappointing when a striking and original figure like Voltaire passes across the field, without an attempt to add one stroke to the portraiture of such a physiognomy.

Gibbon had now (1758) been nearly five years at Lausanne, when his father suddenly intimated that he was to return home immediately. The Seven Years War was at its height, and the French had denied a passage through France to English travellers. Gibbon, or more properly his Swiss friends, thought that the alternative road through Germany might be dangerous, though it might have been assumed that the Great Frederick, so far as he was concerned, would make things as pleasant as possible to British subjects, whose country had just

consented to supply him with a much-needed subsidy. The French route was preferred, perhaps as much from a motive of frolic as anything else. Two Swiss officers of his acquaintance undertook to convey Gibbon from France as one of their companions, under an assumed name, and in borrowed regimentals. His complete mastery of French removed any chance of detection on the score of language, and with a "mixture of joy and regret" on the 11th April, 1758, Gibbon left Lausanne. He had a pleasant journey, but no adventures, and returned to his native land after an absence of four years, ten months, and fifteen days.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE MILITIA.

THE only person whom, on his return, Gibbon had the least wish to see was his aunt, Catherine Porten. To her house he at once hastened, and "the evening was spent in the effusions of joy and tenderness." He looked forward to his first meeting with his father with no slight anxiety, and that for two reasons. First, his father had parted from him with anger and menace, and he had no idea how he would be received now. Secondly, his mother's place was occupied by a second wife, and an involuntary but strong prejudice possessed him against his step-mother. He was most agreeably disappointed in both respects. His father "received him as a man, as a friend, all constraint was banished at our first interview, and we ever after continued on the same terms of easy and equal politeness." So far the prospect was pleasant. But the step-mother remained a possible obstacle to all comfort at home. He seems to have regarded his father's second marriage as an act of displeasure with himself, and he was disposed to hate the rival of his mother. Gibbon soon found that the injustice was in his own fancy, and the imaginary monster was an amiable and deserving woman. "I could not be

mistaken in the first view of her understanding; her knowledge and the elegant spirit of her conversation, her polite welcome, and her assiduous care to study and gratify my wishes announced at least that the surface would be smooth; and my suspicions of art and falsehood were gradually dispelled by the full discovery of her warm and exquisite sensibility." He became indeed deeply attached to his step-mother. "After some reserve on my side, our minds associated in confidence and friendship, and as Mrs. Gibbon had neither children nor the hopes of children, we more easily adopted the tender names and genuine characters of mother and son." A most creditable testimony surely to the worth and amiability of both of them. The friendship thus begun continued without break or coolness to the end of Gibbon's life. Thirty-five years after his first interview with his step mother, and only a few months before his own death, when he was old and ailing, and the least exertion, by reason of his excessive corpulence, involved pain and trouble, he made a long journey to Bath for the sole purpose of paying Mrs. Gibbon a visit. He was very far from being the selfish Epicurean that has been sometimes represented.

He had brought with him from Lausanne the first pages of a work which, after much bashfulness and delay, he at length published in the French language, under the title of *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature*, in the year 1761, that is two years after its completion. In one respect this juvenile work of Gibbon has little merit. The style is at once poor and stilted, and the general quality of remark eminently commonplace, where it does not fall into paradox. On the other hand, it has an interesting and even original side. The main

idea of the little book, so far as it has one, was excellent, and really above the general thought of the age, namely, the vindication of classical literature and history generally from the narrow and singular prejudice which prevailed against them, especially in France. When Gibbon ascribes the design of his first work to a "refinement of vanity, the desire of justifying and praising the object of a favourite pursuit," he does himself less than justice. This first utterance of his historic genius was prompted by an unconscious but deep reaction against that contempt for the past, which was the greatest blot in the speculative movement of the eighteenth century. He resists the temper of his time rather from instinct than reason, and pleads the cause of learning with the hesitation of a man who has not fully seen round his subject, or even mastered his own thoughts upon it. Still there is his protest against the proposal of D'Alembert, who recommended that after a selection of facts had been made at the end of every century the remainder should be delivered to the flames. "Let us preserve them all," he says, "most carefully. A Montesquieu will detect in the most insignificant, relations which the vulgar overlook." He resented the haughty pretensions of the mathematical sciences to universal dominion, with sufficient vigour to have satisfied Auguste Comte. "Physics and mathematics are at present on the throne. They see their sister sciences prostrate before them, chained to their chariot, or at most occupied in adorning their triumph. Perhaps their downfall is not far off." To speak of a positive downfall of exact sciences was a mistake. But we may fairly suppose that Gibbon did not contemplate anything beyond a relative change of

position in the hierarchy of the sciences, by which history and politics would recover or attain to a dignity which was denied them in his day. In one passage Gibbon shows that he had dimly foreseen the possibility of the modern inquiries into the conditions of savage life and prehistoric man. "An Iroquois book, even were it full of absurdities, would be an invaluable treasure. It would offer a unique example of the nature of the human mind placed in circumstances which we have never known, and influenced by manners and religious opinions, the complete opposite of ours." In this sentence Gibbon seems to call in anticipation for the researches which have since been prosecuted with so much success by eminent writers among ourselves, not to mention similar inquirers on the Continent.

But in the meantime Gibbon had entered on a career which removed him for long months from books and study. Without sufficiently reflecting on what such a step involved, he had joined the militia, which was embodied in the year 1760; and for the next two and a half years led as he says, a wandering life of military servitude. At first, indeed, he was so pleased with his new mode of life that he had serious thoughts of becoming a professional soldier. But this enthusiasm speedily wore off, and our "mimic Bellona soon revealed to his eyes her naked deformity." It was indeed no mere playing at soldiering that he had undertaken. He was the practical working commander of "an independent corps of 476 officers and men." "In the absence, or even in the presence of the two field officers" (one of whom was his father, the major) "I was intrusted with the effective labour of dictating the orders and exercising the battalion." And his duty did

not consist in occasional drilling and reviews, but in serious marches, sometimes of thirty miles in a day, and camping under canvas. One encampment, on Winchester Downs, lasted four months. Gibbon does not hesitate to say that the superiority of his grenadiers to the detachments of the regular army, with which they were often mingled, was so striking that the most prejudiced regular could not have hesitated a moment to admit it. But the drilling, and manœuvring, and all that pertained to the serious side of militia business interested Gibbon, and though it took up time it gave him knowledge of a special kind, of which he quite appreciated the value. He was much struck, for instance, by the difference between the nominal and effective force of every regiment he had seen, even when supposed to be complete, and gravely doubts whether a nominal army of 100,000 men often brings *fifty* thousand into the field. What he found unendurable was the constant shifting of quarters, the utter want of privacy and leisure it often entailed, and the distasteful society in which he was forced to live. For eight months at a stretch he never took a book in his hand. "From the day we marched from Blandford, I had hardly a moment I could call my own, being almost continually in motion, or if I was fixed for a day, it was in the guardroom, a barrack, or an inn." Even worse were the drinking and late hours; sometimes in "rustic" company, sometimes in company in which joviality and wit were more abundant than decorum and common sense, which will surprise no one who hears that the famous John Wilkes, who was colonel of the Buckingham militia, was not unfrequently one of his boon companions. A few extracts from his journal will be enough.

"To-day (August 28, 1762), Sir Thomas Worsley," the colonel of the battalion, "came to us to dinner. Pleased to see him, we kept bumperising till after roll-calling, Sir Thomas assuring us every fresh bottle how infinitely sober he was growing." September 23rd. "Colonel Wilkes, of the Buckingham militia, dined with us, and renewed the acquaintance Sir Thomas and myself had begun with him at Reading. I scarcely ever met with a better companion; he has inexhaustible spirits, infinite wit and humour, and a great deal of knowledge . . . This proved a very debauched day; we drank a great deal both after dinner and supper; and when at last Wilkes had retired, Sir Thomas and some others (of whom I was not one) broke into his room and made him drink a bottle of claret in bed." December 17. "We found old Captain Meard at Arlesford with the second division of the Fourteenth. He and all his officers supped with us, which made the evening rather a drunken one." Gibbon might well say that the militia was unfit for and unworthy of him.

Yet it is quite astonishing to see, as recorded in his journal, how keen an interest he still managed to retain in literature in the midst of all this dissipation, and how fertile he was of schemes and projects of future historical works to be prosecuted under more favourable auspices. Subject after subject occurred to him as eligible and attractive; he caresses the idea for a time, then lays it aside for good reasons. First, he pitched upon the expedition of Charles VIII. of France into Italy. He read and meditated upon it, and wrote a dissertation of ten folio pages, besides large notes, in which he examined the right of Charles VIII. to the crown of Naples, and the rival claims of the houses of

Anjou and Aragon. In a few weeks he gives up this idea, firstly, for the rather odd reason that the subject was too remote from us; and, secondly, for the very good reason that the expedition was rather the introduction to great events than great and important in itself. He then successively chose and rejected the Crusade of Richard the First; the Barons' War against John and Henry III.; the history of Edward the Black Prince; the lives and comparisons of Henry V. and the Emperor Titus; the life of Sir Philip Sidney, and that of the Marquis of Montrose. At length he fixed on Sir Walter Raleigh as his hero. On this he worked with all the assiduity that his militia life allowed, read a great quantity of original documents relating to it, and, after some months of labour, declared that "his subject opened upon him, and in general improved upon a nearer prospect." But half a year later he "is afraid he will have to drop his hero." And he covers half a page with reasons to persuade himself that he was right in doing so. Besides the obvious one that he would be able to add little that was not already accessible in Oldys' *Life of Raleigh*, that the topic was exhausted, and so forth, he goes on to make these remarks, which have more signification to us now than perhaps they had to him when he wrote them. "Could I even surmount these obstacles, I should shrink with terror from the modern history of England, where every character is a problem and every reader a friend or an enemy: when a writer is supposed to hoist a flag of party, and is devoted to damnation by the adverse faction. Such would be *my* reception at home; and abroad the historian of Raleigh must encounter an indifference far more bitter than censure or reproach. The events of his life are interesting; but

his character is ambiguous; his actions are obscure; his writings are English, and his fame is confined to the narrow limits of our language and our island. *I must embrace a safer and more extensive theme.*" Here we see the first gropings after a theme of cosmopolitan interest. He has arrived at two negative conclusions: that it must not be English, and must not be narrow. What it is to be, does not yet appear, for he has still a series of subjects to go through, to be taken up and discarded. The history of the liberty of the Swiss, which at a later period he partially achieved, was one scheme; the history of Florence under the Medici was another. He speaks with enthusiasm of both projects, adding that he will most probably fix upon the latter; but he never did anything of the kind.

These were the topics which occupied Gibbon's mind during his service in the militia, escaping when he could from the uproar and vulgarity of the camp and the guardroom to the sanctuary of the historic muse, to worship in secret. But these private devotions could not remove his disgust at "the inn, the wine, and the company" he was forced to endure, and latterly the militia became downright insupportable to him. But honourable motives kept him to his post. "From a service without danger I might have retired without disgrace; but as often as I hinted a wish of resigning, my fetters were riveted by the friendly intreaties of the colonel, the parental authority of the major, and my own regard for the welfare of the battalion." At last the long-wished-for day arrived, when the militia was disbanded. "Our two companies," he writes in his journal, "were disembodied (December 23rd, 1762), mine at Alton, my father's at

Buriton. They fired three volleys, lodged the major's colours, delivered up their arms, received their money, partook of a dinner at the major's expense, and then separated, with great cheerfulness and regularity. Thus ended the militia." The compression that his spirit had endured was shown by the rapid energy with which he sought a change of scene and oblivion of his woes. Within little more than a month after the scene just described, Gibbon was in Paris beginning the grand tour.

With that keen sense of the value of time which marked him, Gibbon with great impartiality cast up and estimated the profit and loss of his "bloodless campaigns." Both have been alluded to already. He summed up with great fairness in the entry that he made in his journal on the evening of the day on which he recovered his liberty. "I am glad that the militia has been, and glad that it is no more." This judgment he confirmed thirty years afterwards, when he composed his Memoirs. "My principal obligation to the militia was the making me an Englishman and a soldier. After my foreign education, with my reserved temper, I should long have continued a stranger in my native country, had I not been shaken in this various scene of new faces and new friends; had not experience forced me to feel the characters of our leading men, the state of parties, the forms of office, the operations of our civil and military system. In this peaceful service I imbibed the rudiments of the language and science of tactics, which opened a new field of study and observation. I diligently read and meditated the *Mémoires Militaires* of Quintus Icilius, the only writer who has united the merits of a professor and a veteran.

The discipline and evolution of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion, and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers (the reader may smile) has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire." No one can doubt it who compares Gibbon's numerous narratives of military operations with the ordinary performances of civil historians in those matters. The campaigns of Julian, Belisarius, and Heraclius, not to mention many others, have not only an uncommon lucidity, but also exhibit a clear appreciation of the obstacles and arduousness of war-like operations, which is rare or unknown to non-military writers. Macaulay has pointed out that Swift's party pamphlets are superior in an especial way to the ordinary productions of that class, in consequence of Swift's unavowed but very serious participation in the cabinet councils of Oxford and Bolingbroke. In the same manner Gibbon had an advantage through his military training, which gives him no small superiority to even the best historical writers who have been without it.

The course of foreign travel which Gibbon was now about to commence had been contemplated before, but the war and the militia had postponed it for nearly three years. It appears that as early as the year 1760 the elder Gibbon had conceived the project of procuring a seat in Parliament for his son, and was willing to incur the anticipated expense of £1500 for that object. Young Gibbon, who seems to have very accurately gauged his own abilities at that early age, was convinced that the money could be much better employed in another way. He wrote in consequence, under his father's roof, a letter to the latter which does such credit to his

head and to his heart, that, although it is somewhat long, it cannot with propriety be omitted here.

EDWARD GIBBON TO HIS FATHER.

"Dear Sir,

"An address in writing from a person who has the pleasure of being with you every day may appear singular. However I have preferred this method, as upon paper I can speak without a blush and be heard without interruption. If my letter displeases you, impute it, dear sir, to yourself. You have treated me, not like a son, but like a friend. Can you be surprised that I should communicate to a friend all my thoughts and all my desires? Unless the friend approve them, let the father never know them; or at least let him know at the same time that however reasonable, however eligible, my scheme may appear to me, I would rather forget it for ever than cause him the slightest uneasiness.

"When I first returned to England, attentive to my future interests, you were so good as to give me hopes of a seat in Parliament. This seat, it was supposed, would be an expense of fifteen hundred pounds. This design flattered my vanity, as it might enable me to shine in so august an assembly. It flattered a nobler passion: I promised myself that, by the means of this seat, I might one day be the instrument of some good to my country. But I soon perceived how little mere virtuous inclination, unassisted by talents, could contribute towards that great end, and a very short examination discovered to me that those talents had not fallen to my lot. Do not, dear sir, impute this declaration to a false modesty—the meanest species of pride. Whatever else I may be ignorant of, I think I know myself, and shall always endeavour to mention my good qualities without vanity and my defects without repugnance. I shall say nothing of the most intimate acquaintance with his country and language, so absolutely necessary to every senator; since they may be acquired, to allege my deficiency in them would seem only the plea of laziness. But I shall say with

great truth that I never possessed that gift of speech, the first requisite of an orator, which use and labour may improve, but which nature can alone bestow ; that my temper, quiet, retired, somewhat reserved, could neither acquire popularity, bear up against opposition, nor mix with ease in the crowds of public life ; that even my genius (if you allow me any) is better qualified for the deliberate compositions of the closet than for the extempore discourses of Parliament. An unexpected objection would disconcert me, and as I am incapable of explaining to others what I do not understand myself, I should be meditating when I ought to be answering. I even want necessary prejudices of party and of nation. In popular assemblies it is often necessary to inspire them, and never orator inspired well a passion which he did not feel himself. Suppose me even mistaken in my own character, to set out with the repugnance such an opinion must produce offers but an indifferent prospect. But I hear you say it is not necessary that every man should enter into Parliament with such exalted hopes. It is to acquire a title the most glorious of any in a free country, and to employ the weight and consideration it gives in the service of one's friends. Such motives, though not glorious, yet are not dishonourable, and if we had a borough in our command, if you could bring me in without any great expense, or if our fortune enabled us to despise that expense, then indeed I should think them of the greatest strength. But with our private fortune, is it worth while to purchase at so high a rate a title honourable in itself, but which I must share with every fellow that can lay out 1500 pounds? Besides, dear sir, a merchandise is of little value to the owner when he is resolved not to sell it.

"I should affront your penetration did I not suppose you now see the drift of this letter. It is to appropriate to another use the sum with which you destined to bring me into Parliament ; to employ it, not in making me great, but in rendering me happy. I have often heard you say yourself that the allowance you had been so indulgent as to grant me, though very liberal in regard to your estate, was yet but small when compared with the almost necessary extravagances of the age. I have indeed

found it so, notwithstanding a good deal of economy, and an exemption from many of the common expenses of youth. This, dear sir, would be a way of supplying these deficiencies without any additional expense to you. But I forbear—if you think my proposals reasonable, you want no intreaties to engage you to comply with them, if otherwise all will be without effect.

"All that I am afraid of, dear sir, is that I should seem not so much asking a favour, as this really is, as exacting a debt. After all I can say, you will remain the best judge of my good and your own circumstances. Perhaps, like most landed gentlemen, an addition to my annuity would suit you better than a sum of money given at once; perhaps the sum itself may be too considerable. Whatever you may think proper to bestow on me, or in whatever manner, will be received with equal gratitude.

"I intended to stop here, but as I abhor the least appearance of art, I think it better to lay open my whole scheme at once. The unhappy war which now desolates Europe will oblige me to defer seeing France till a peace. But that reason can have no influence on Italy, a country which every scholar must long to see. Should you grant my request, and not disapprove of my manner of employing your bounty, I would leave England this autumn and pass the winter at Lausanne with M. de Voltaire and my old friends. In the spring I would cross the Alps, and after some stay in Italy, as the war must then be terminated, return home through France, to live happily with you and my dear mother. I am now two-and-twenty; a tour must take up a considerable time; and although I believe you have no thoughts of settling me soon (and I am sure I have not), yet so many things may intervene that the man who does not travel early runs a great risk of not travelling at all. But this part of my scheme, as well as the whole of it, I submit entirely to you.

"Permit me, dear sir, to add that I do not know whether the complete compliance with my wishes could increase my love and gratitude, but that I am very sure no refusal could diminish those sentiments with which I shall always remain, dear sir, your most dutiful and obedient son and servant.

"E. GIBBON, JUN."

Instead of going to Italy in the autumn of 1760, as he fondly hoped when he wrote this letter, Gibbon was marching about the south of England at the head of his grenadiers. But the scheme sketched in the above letter was only postponed, and ultimately realised in every particular. The question of a seat in Parliament never came up again during his father's life, and no doubt the money it would have cost was, according to his wise suggestion, devoted to defray the expenses of his foreign tour, which he is now about to begin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY.

GIBBON reached Paris on the 28th January, 1763; thirty-six days, as he tells us, after the disbanding of the militia. He remained a little over three months in the French capital, which on the whole pleased him so well that he thinks that if he had been independent and rich, he might have been tempted to make it his permanent residence.

On the other hand he seems to have been little if at all aware of the extraordinary character of the society of which he became a spectator and for a time a member. He does not seem to have been conscious that he was witnessing one of the most singular social phases which have yet been presented in the history of man. And no blame attaches to him for this. No one of his contemporaries saw deeper in this direction than he did. It is a remarkable instance of the way in which the widest and deepest social movements are veiled to the eyes of those who see them, precisely because of their width and depth. Foreigners, especially Englishmen, visited Paris in the latter half of the eighteenth century and reported variously of their experience and impressions. Some, like Hume and Sterne, are delighted;

some, like Gibbon, are quietly, but thoroughly pleased; some, like Walpole—though he perhaps is a class by himself—are half pleased and half disgusted. They all feel that there is something peculiar in what they witness, but never seem to suspect that nothing like it was ever seen before in the world. One is tempted to wish that they could have seen with our eyes, or, much more, that we could have had the privilege of enjoying their experience, of spending a few months in that singular epoch when "society," properly so called, the assembling of men and women in drawing-rooms for the purpose of conversation, was the most serious as well as the most delightful business of life. Talk and discussion in the senate, the market-place, and the schools are cheap; even barbarians are not wholly without them. But their refinement and concentration in the *salon*—of which the president is a woman of tact and culture—this is a phenomenon which never appeared but in Paris in the eighteenth century. And yet scholars, men of the world, men of business passed through this wonderland with eyes blindfolded. They are free to enter, they go, they come, without a sign that they have realised the marvellous scene that they were permitted to traverse. One does not wonder that they did not perceive that in those graceful drawing-rooms, filled with stately company of elaborate manners, ideas and sentiments were discussed and evolved which would soon be more explosive than gunpowder. One does not wonder that they did not see ahead of them—men never do. One does rather wonder that they did not see what was before their eyes. But wonder is useless and a mistake. People who have never seen a volcano

cannot be expected to fear the burning lava, or even to see that a volcano differs from any other mountain.

Gibbon had brought good introductions from London, but he admits that they were useless, or rather superfluous. His nationality and his *Essai* were his best recommendations. It was the day of Anglomania, and, as he says, "every Englishman was supposed to be a patriot and a philosopher." "I had rather be," said Mdlle. de Lespinasse to Lord Shelburne, "the least member of the House of Commons than even the King of Prussia." Similar things must have been said to Gibbon, but he has not recorded them; and generally it may be said that he is disappointingly dull and indifferent to Paris, though he liked it well enough when there. He never caught the Paris fever as Hume did, and Sterne, or even as Walpole did, for all the hard things he says of the underbred and overbearing manners of the philosophers. Gibbon had ready access to the well known houses of Madame Geoffrin, Madame Helvétius and the Baron d'Holbach; and his perfect mastery of the language must have removed every obstacle in the way of complete social intercourse. But no word in his Memoirs or Letters shows that he really saw with the eyes of the mind the singularities of that strange epoch. And yet he was there at an exciting and important moment. The Order of the Jesuits was tottering to its fall; the latter volumes of the *Encyclopedia* were being printed, and it was no secret; the coruscating wit and audacity of the *salons* were at their height. He is not unjust or prejudiced, but somewhat cold. He dines with Baron d'Holbach, and says his dinners were excellent, but nothing of the guests. He goes to Madame Geoffrin, and pronounces her house an excellent

one. Such faint and commonplace praise reflects on the eulogist. The only man of letters of whom he speaks with warmth is Helvétius. He does not appear in this first visit to have known Madame du Deffand, who was still keeping her *salon* with the help of the pale deep-eyed L'Espinasse, though the final rupture was imminent. Louis Racine died, and so did Marivaux, while he was in Paris. The old Opera-house in the Palais Royal was burnt down when he had been there a little over a month, and the representations were transferred to the Salle des Machines, in the Tuileries. The equestrian statue of Louis XV. was set up in the Place to which it gave its name (where the Luxor column now stands, in the Place de la Concorde) amidst the jeers and insults of the mob, who declared it would never be got to pass the hotel of Madame de Pompadour. How much or how little of all this touched Gibbon, we do not know. We do know one thing, that his English clothes were unfashionable and looked very foreign, the French being "excessively long-waisted." Doubtless his scanty purse could not afford a new outfit, such as Walpole two years afterwards, under the direction of Lady Hertford, promptly procured. On the 8th of May he hurried off to Lausanne.[1]

His ultimate object was Italy. But he wisely resolved to place a period of solid study between the lively dissipation of Paris and his classic pilgrimage. He knew the difference between seeing things he had read about and reading about things after he had seen them; how the mind, charged with associations of famous scenes, is delicately susceptible of impressions, and how

[1] The chronicle of events which occurred during Gibbon's sojourn in Paris will be found in the interesting *Mémoires de Bachaumont*.

rapidly old musings take form and colour, when stirred by outward realities; and contrariwise, how slow and inadequate is the effort to reverse this process, and to clothe with memories, monuments and sites over which the spirit has not sent a halo of previous meditation. So he settled down quietly at Lausanne for the space of nearly a year, and commenced a most austere and systematic course of reading on the antiquities of Italy. The list of learned works which he perused "with his pen in his hand" is formidable, and fills a quarto page. But he went further than this, and compiled an elaborate treatise on the nations, provinces, and towns of ancient Italy (which we still have) digested in alphabetical order, in which every Latin author, from Plautus to Rutilius, is laid under contribution for illustrative passages, which are all copied out in full. This laborious work was evidently Gibbon's own guide-book in his Italian travels, and one sees not only what an admirable preparation it was for the object in view, but what a promise it contained of that scrupulous thoroughness which was to be his mark as an historian. His mind was indeed rapidly maturing, and becoming conscious in what direction its strength lay.

His account of his first impressions of Rome has been often quoted, and deserves to be so again. "My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm which I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect. But at the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the Eternal City. After a sleepless night, I trod with a lofty step the ruins of the Forum. Each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Cæsar fell, was

at once present to my eye, and several days of intoxication were lost and enjoyed before I could descend to a cool and minute examination." He gave eighteen weeks to the study of Rome only, and six to Naples, and we may rest assured that he made good use of his time. But what makes this visit to Rome memorable in his life and in literary history is that it was the occasion and date of the first conception of his great work. "It was at Rome, on the 15th October, 1764, as I sat musing amid the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind." The scene, the contrast of the old religion and the new, the priests of Christ replacing the flamens of Jupiter, the evensong of Catholic Rome swelling like a dirge over the prostrate Pagan Rome might well concentrate in one grand luminous idea the manifold but unconnected thoughts with which his mind had so long been teeming. Gibbon had found his work, which was destined to fill the remainder of his life. Henceforth there is a fixed centre around which his thoughts and musings cluster spontaneously. Difficulties and interruptions are not wanting. The plan then formed is not taken in hand at once; on the contrary, it is contemplated at "an awful distance"; but it led him on like a star guiding his steps, till he reached his appointed goal.

After crossing the Alps on his homeward journey, Gibbon had had some thoughts of visiting the southern provinces of France. But when he reached Lyons he found letters "expressive of some impatience" for his return. Though he does not exactly say as much, we may justly conclude that the elder Gibbon's pecuniary

difficulties were beginning to be oppressive. So the traveller, with the dutifulness that he ever showed to his father, at once bent his steps northward. Again he passed through Paris, and the place had a new attraction in his eyes in the person of Mdlle. Curchod, now become Madame Necker, and wife of the great financier.

This perhaps will be the most convenient place to notice and estimate a certain amount of rather spiteful gossip, of which Gibbon was the subject in Switzerland about this time. Rousseau and his friend Moultou have preserved it for us, and it is probable that it has lost none of its pungency in passing through the hands of the latter. The substance of it is this:—that in the year 1763, when Gibbon revisited Lausanne, as we have seen, Susanne Curchod was still in a pitiable state of melancholy and well nigh broken-hearted at Gibbon's manifest coldness, which we know he considered to be "friendship and esteem." Whether he even saw her on this visit cannot be considered certain, but it is at least highly probable. Be that as it may: this is the picture of her condition as drawn by Moultou in a letter to Rousseau: "How sorry I am for our poor Mdlle. Curchod! Gibbon, whom she loves, and to whom I know she has sacrificed some excellent matches, has come to Lausanne, but cold, insensible, and as entirely cured of his old passion as she is far from cure. She has written me a letter that makes my heart ache." Rousseau says in reply, "He who does not appreciate Mdlle. Curchod is not worthy of her; he who appreciates her and separates himself from her is a man to be despised. She does not know what she wants. Gibbon serves her better than her own heart. I would rather a hundred times that he left her poor and free among you than

that he should take her off to be rich and miserable in England." One does not quite see how Gibbon could have acted to the contentment of Jean-Jacques. For not taking Mdlle. Curchod to England—as we may presume he would have done if he had married her—he is contemptible. Yet if he does take her he will make her miserable, and Rousseau would rather a hundred times he left her alone—precisely what he was doing; but then he was despicable for doing it. The question is whether there is not a good deal of exaggeration in all this. Only a year after the tragic condition in which Moultou describes Mdlle. Curchod she married M. Necker, and became devoted to her husband. A few months after she married Necker she cordially invited Gibbon to her house every day of his sojourn in Paris. If Gibbon had behaved in the unworthy way asserted, if she had had her feelings so profoundly touched and lacerated as Moultou declares, would she, or even could she, have acted thus? If she was conscious of being wronged, and he was conscious—as he must have been—of having acted basely, or at least unfeelingly, is it not as good as certain that both parties would have been careful to see as little of each other as possible? A broken-off love match, even without complication of unworthy conduct on either side, is generally an effective bar to further intercourse. But in this case the intercourse is renewed on the very first opportunity, and never dropped till the death of one of the persons concerned.

Two letters have been preserved of Gibbon and Madame Necker respectively, nearly of the same date, and both referring to this rather delicate topic of their first interviews after her marriage. Gibbon writes to

his friend Holroyd, "The Curchod (Madame Necker) I saw in Paris. She was very fond of me, and the husband particularly civil. Could they insult me more cruelly? Ask me every evening to supper, go to bed and leave me alone with his wife—what impertinent security! It is making an old lover of mighty little consequence. She is as handsome as ever, and much genteeler; seems pleased with her wealth rather than proud of it. I was exalting Nanette d'Illens's good luck and the fortune" (this evidently refers to some common acquaintance, who had changed her name to advantage). "'What fortune,' she said with an air of contempt:—'not above twenty thousand livres a year.' I smiled, and she caught herself immediately, 'What airs I give myself in despising twenty thousand livres a year, who a year ago looked upon eight hundred as the summit of my wishes.'"

Let us turn to the lady's account of the same scenes. "I do not know if I told you," she writes to a friend at Lausanne, "that I have seen Gibbon, and it has given me more pleasure than I know how to express. Not indeed that I retain any sentiment for a man who I think does not deserve much" (this little toss of pique or pride need not mislead us); "but my feminine vanity could not have had a more complete and honest triumph. He stayed two weeks in Paris, and I had him every day at my house; he has become soft, yielding, humble, decorous to a fault. He was a constant witness of my husband's kindness, wit, and gaiety, and made me remark for the first time, by his admiration for wealth, the opulence with which I am surrounded, and which up to this moment had only produced a disagreeable impression upon me." Considering the very

different points of view of the writers, these letters are remarkably in unison. The solid fact of the daily visits is recorded in both. It is easy to gather from Madame Necker's letter that she was very glad to show Mr. Gibbon that for going farther and not marrying him she had not fared worse. The rather acid allusion to "opulence" is found in both letters; but much more pronounced in hers than in his. Each hints that the other thought too much of wealth. But he does so with delicacy, and only by implication; she charges him coarsely with vulgar admiration for it. We may reasonably suspect that riches had been the subject of not altogether smooth conversation between them, in the later part of the evening, perhaps, after M. Necker had retired in triumph to bed. One might even fancy that there was a tacit allusion by Madame Necker to the dialogue recorded by Gibbon to Holroyd, when his smile checked her indirect pride in her own wealth, and that she remembered that smile with just a touch of resentment. If so, nothing was more natural and comforting than to charge him with the failing that he had detected in her. But here are the facts. Eight months after her marriage, Madame Necker admits that she had Gibbon every day to her house. He says that she was very cordial. She would have it understood that she received him only for the sake of gratifying a feminine vanity. For her own sake one might prefer his interpretation to hers. It is difficult to believe that the essentially simple-minded Madame Necker would have asked a man every day to her house merely to triumph over him; and more difficult still to believe that the man would have gone if such had been the object. A little tartness in these first interviews, following on a relation of some

ambiguity, cannot surprise one. But it was not the dominant ingredient, or the interviews must have ceased of their own accord. In any case few will admit that either of the persons concerned would have written as they did if Moultou's statement were correct. In neither epistle is there any trace of a grand passion felt or slighted. We discover the much lower level of vanity and badinage. And the subsequent relations of Gibbon and Madame Necker all tend to prove that this was the real one.

CHAPTER V.

LITERARY SCHEMES.—THE HISTORY OF SWITZERLAND.—DISSERTATION ON THE SIXTH ÆNEID.—FATHER'S DEATH.—SETTLEMENT IN LONDON.

Gibbon now (June, 1765) returned to his father's house, and remained there till the latter's death in 1770. He describes these five years as having been the least pleasant and satisfactory of his whole life. The reasons were not far to seek. The unthrifty habits of the elder Gibbon were now producing their natural result. He was saddled with debt, from which two mortgages, readily consented to by his son, and the sale of the house at Putney, only partially relieved him. Gibbon now began to fear that he had an old age of poverty before him. He had pursued knowledge with single-hearted loyalty, and now became aware that from a worldly point of view knowledge is not often a profitable investment. A more dejecting discovery cannot be made by the sincere scholar. He is conscious of labour and protracted effort, which the prosperous professional man and tradesman who pass him on their road to wealth with a smile of scornful pity have never known. He has forsaken comparatively all for knowledge, and the busy world meets him with a blank stare, and surmises shrewdly that he is but an idler, with an odd taste for

wasting his time over books. It says much for Gibbon's robustness of spirit that he did not break down in these trying years, that he did not weakly take fright at his prospect, and make hasty and violent efforts to mend it. On the contrary, he remained steadfast and true to the things of the mind. With diminished cheerfulness perhaps, but with no abatement of zeal, he pursued his course and his studies, thereby proving that he belonged to the select class of the strong and worthy who, penetrated with the loveliness of science, will not be turned away from it.

His first effort to redeem the time was a project of a history of Switzerland. His choice was decided by two circumstances: (1) his love for a country which he had made his own by adoption; (2) by the fact that he had in his friend Deyverdun, a fellow-worker who could render him most valuable assistance. Gibbon never knew German, which is not surprising when we reflect what German literature amounted to, in those days; and he soon discovered that the most valuable authorities of his projected work were in the German language. But Deyverdun was a perfect master of that tongue, and translated a mass of documents for the use of his friend. They laboured for two years in collecting materials, before Gibbon felt himself justified in entering on the "more agreeable task of composition." And even then he considered the preparation insufficient, as no doubt it was. He felt he could not do justice to his subject; uninformed as he was "by the scholars and statesmen, and remote from the archives and libraries of the Swiss republic." Such a beginning was not of good augury for the success of the undertaking. He never wrote more than about

sixty quarto pages of the projected work, and these, as they were in French, were submitted to the judgment of a literary society of foreigners in London, before whom the MS. was read. The author was unknown, and Gibbon attended the meeting, and thus listened without being observed "to the free strictures and unfavourable sentence of his judges." He admits that the momentary sensation was painful; but the condemnation was ratified by his cooler thoughts: and he declares that he did not regret the loss of a slight and superficial essay, though it "had cost some expense, much labour, and more time." He says in his Memoirs that he burnt the sheets. But this, strange to say, was a mistake on his part. They were found among his papers after his death, and though not published by Lord Sheffield in the first two volumes of his Miscellaneous Works, which the latter edited in 1796, they appeared in the supplemental third volume which came out in 1815. We thus can judge for ourselves of their value. One sees at once why and how they failed to satisfy their author's mature judgment. They belong to that style of historical writing which consists in the rhetorical transcription and adornment of the original authorities, but in which the writer never gets close enough to his subject to apply the touchstone of a clear and trenchant criticism. Such criticism indeed was not common in Switzerland in his day, and one cannot blame Gibbon for not anticipating the researches of modern investigators. But his historical sense was aroused to suspicion by the story of William Tell, which he boldly sets down as a fable. Altogether, one may pronounce the sketch to be pleasantly written in a flowing, picturesque narrative, and showing immense advance in style beyond the essay on the Study

of Literature. David Hume, to whom he submitted it, urged him to persevere, and the advice was justified under the circumstances, although one cannot now regret that it was not followed.

After the failure of this scheme Gibbon, still in connection with Deyverdun, planned a periodical work under the title of *Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*. Only two volumes ever appeared, and the speculation does not seem to have met with much success. Gibbon "presumes to say that their merit was superior to their reputation, though they produced more reputation than emolument." The first volume is executed with evident pains, and gives a fair picture of the literary and social condition of England at the time. The heavy review articles are interspersed with what is intended to be lighter matter on the fashions, foibles, and prominent characters of the day. Gibbon owns the authorship of the first article on Lord Lyttelton's history of Henry the Second, and his hand is discernible in the account of the fourth volume of Lardner's work *On the Credibility of the Gospel History*. The first has no merit beyond a faithful report. The latter is written with much more zest and vigour, and shows the interest that he already took in Christian antiquities. Other articles, evidently from the pen of Deyverdun, on the English theatre and Beau Nash of Bath, are the liveliest in the collection. The magazine was avowedly intended for Continental readers, and might have obtained success if it had been continued long enough. But it died before it had time to make itself known.[1]

[1] Two volumes appeared of the *Mémoires Littéraires*. Of these only the first is to be found in the British Museum. It is a small 12mo, containing 230 pages. Here is the Table des Matières :—(1)

When the *Mémoires Littéraires* collapsed Gibbon was again left without a definite object to concentrate his energy, and with his work still to seek. One might wonder why he did not seriously prepare for the *Decline and Fall*. It must have been chiefly at this time that it was "contemplated at an awful distance," perhaps even with numbing doubt whether the distance would ever be lessened and the work achieved, or even begun. The probability is he had too little peace of mind to undertake anything that required calm and protracted labour. "While so many of my acquaintance were married, or in Parliament, or advancing with a rapid step in the various roads of honour or fortune I stood alone, immovable, and insignificant. . . . The progress and the knowledge of our domestic disorders aggravated my anxiety, and I began to apprehend that in my old age I might be left without the fruits of either industry or inheritance." Perhaps a reasonable apprehension of poverty is more paralysing than the reality. In the latter case prompt action is so imperatively commanded that the mind has no leisure for the fatal indulgence of regrets; but when indigence seems only imminent, and has not yet arrived, a certain lethargy is apt to be produced out of which only the most practical characters can rouse themselves, and these are not, as a rule, scholars by nature. We need not be surprised that Gibbon

Histoire de Henri II., par Milord Lyttelton; (2) Le Nouveau Guide de Bath; (3) Essai sur l'Histoire de la Société Civile, par M. Ferguson; (4) Conclusions des Mémoires de Miss Sydney Bidulph; Théologie (5) Recueil des Témoignages Anciens, par Lardner; (6) Le Confessional; (7) Transactions Philosophiques; (8) Le Gouverneur, par D. L. F. Spectacles, Beaux Arts, Nouvelles Littéraires.

during these years did nothing serious, and postponed undertaking his great work. The inspiration needed to accomplish such a long and arduous course as it implied could not be kindled in a mind harassed by pecuniary cares. The fervent heat of a poet's imagination may glow as brightly in poverty as in opulence, but the gentle yet prolonged enthusiasm of the historian is likely to be quenched when the resources of life are too insecure.[1]

It is perhaps not wholly fanciful to suspect that Gibbon's next literary effort was suggested and determined by the inward discomposure he felt at this time. By nature he was not a controversialist; not that he wanted the abilities to support that character, but his mind was too full, fertile, and fond of real knowledge to take much pleasure in the generally barren occupation of gainsaying other men. But at this point in his life he made an exception, and an unprovoked exception. When he wrote his famous vindication of the first volume of the *Decline and Fall* he was acting in self-defence, and repelling savage attacks upon his historical veracity. But in his *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Æneid* he sought controversy for its own sake, and became a polemic—shall we say out of gaiety or bitterness of heart? That inward unrest easily produces an aggressive spirit is a matter of common observation, and it may well have been that in attacking Warburton he sought a diversion from the worry of domestic cares. Be that as it may, his *Obser-*

[1] Scholarship has been frequently cultivated amidst great poverty; but from the time of Thucydides, the owner of mines, to Grote, the banker, historians seem to have been in, at least, easy circumstances.

vations are the most pungent and dashing effusion he ever allowed himself. It was his first effort in English prose, and it is doubtful whether he ever managed his mother tongue better, if indeed he ever managed it so well. The little tract is written with singular spirit and rapidity of style. It is clear, trenchant, and direct to a fault. It is indeed far less critical than polemical, and shows no trace of lofty calm, either moral or intellectual. We are not repelled much by his eagerness to refute and maltreat his opponent. That was not alien from the usages of the time, and Warburton at least had no right to complain of such a style of controversy. But there is no width and elevation of view. The writer does not carry the discussion up to a higher level, and dominate his adversary from a superior standpoint. Controversy is always ephemeral and vulgar, unless it can rise to the discussion and establishment of facts and principles valuable for themselves, independently of the particular point at issue. It is this quality which has made the master-works of Chillingworth and Bentley supereminent. The particular point for which the writers contended is settled or forgotten. But in moving up to that point they touched—such was their large discourse of reason—on topics of perennial interest, did such justice, though only in passing, to certain other truths, that they are gratefully remembered ever after. Thus Bentley's dissertation on Phalaris is read, not for the main thesis—proof of the spuriousness of the letters—but for the profound knowledge and admirable logic with which subsidiary positions are maintained on the way to it. Tried by this standard, and he deserves to be tried by a high standard, Gibbon fails not much, but entirely. The *Observations* are rarely,

if ever, quoted as an authority of weight by any one engaged on classical or Virgilian literature. This arises from the attitude of the writer, who is nearly solely occupied with establishing negative conclusions that Æneas was *not* a lawgiver, that the Sixth Æneid is *not* an allegory, that Virgil had *not* been initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries when he wrote it, and so forth. Indeed the best judges now hold that he has not done full justice to the grain of truth that was to be found in Warburton's clumsy and prolix hypothesis.[1] It should be added that Gibbon very candidly admits and regrets the acrimonious style of the pamphlet, and condemns still more "in a personal attack his cowardly concealment of his name and character."

The *Observations* were the last work which Gibbon published in his father's lifetime. His account of the latter's death (November 10, 1770) is feelingly written, and shows the affectionate side of his own nature to advantage. He acknowledges his father's failings, his weakness and inconstancy, but insists that they were compensated by the virtues of the head and heart, and the warmest sentiments of honour and humanity. "His graceful person, polite address, gentle manners, and unaffected cheerfulness recommended him to the favour of every company." And Gibbon recalls with emotion "the pangs of shame, tenderness, and self-reproach"

[1] Conington, *Introduction to the Sixth Æneid.* "A reader of the present day will, I think, be induced to award the palm of learning and ingenuity to Warburton." "The language and imagery of the sixth book more than once suggest that Virgil intended to embody in his picture the poetical view of that inner side of ancient religion which the mysteries may be supposed to have presented."—*Suggestion on the Study of the Æneid*, by H. Nettleship, p. 13.

which preyed on his father's mind at the prospect, no doubt, of leaving an embarrassed estate and precarious fortune to his son and widow. He had no taste for study in the fatal summer of 1770, and declares that he would have been ashamed if he had. "I submitted to the order of nature," he says, in words which recall his resignation on losing his mistress—"I submitted to the order of nature, and my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety." We see Gibbon very fairly in this remark. He had tenderness, steady and warm attachments, but no passion.

Nearly two years elapsed after his father's death, before he was able to secure from the wreck of his estate a sufficient competence to establish himself in London. His house was No. 7, Bentinck Street, near Manchester Square, then a remote suburb close to the country fields. His housekeeping was that of a solitary bachelor, who could afford an occasional dinner-party. Though not absolutely straitened in means, we shall presently see that he was never quite at his ease in money matters while he remained in London. But he had now freedom and no great anxieties, and he began seriously to contemplate the execution of his great work.

Gibbon, as we have seen, looked back with little satisfaction on the five years between his return from his travels and his father's death. They are also the years during which his biographer is able to follow him with the least certainty. Hardly any of his letters which refer to that period have been preserved, and he has glided rapidly over it in his Memoirs. Yet it was, in other respects besides the matter of pecuniary troubles, a momentous epoch in his life. The peculiar views

which he adopted and partly professed on religion must have been formed then. But the date, the circumstance, and the occasion are left in darkness. Up to December 18, 1763, Gibbon was evidently a believer. In an entry in his private journal under that date he speaks of a Communion Sunday at Lausanne as affording an "edifying spectacle," on the ground that there is "neither business nor parties, and they interdict even whist" on that day. How soon after this his opinions began to change, it is impossible to say. But we are conscious of a markedly different tone in the *Observations*, and a sneer at "the ancient alliance between the avarice of the priests and the credulity of the people" is in the familiar style of the Deists from Toland to Chubb. There is no evidence of his familiarity with the widely diffused works of the freethinkers, and as far as I am aware he does not quote or refer to them even once. But they could hardly have escaped his notice. Still his strong historic sense and solid erudition would be more likely to be repelled than attracted by their vague and inaccurate scholarship, and chimerical theories of the light of Nature. Still we know that he practically adopted, in the end, at least the negative portion of these views, and the question is, When did he do so? His visit to Paris, and the company that he frequented there, might suggest that as a probable date of his change of opinions. But the entry just referred to was subsequent by several months to that visit, and we may with confidence assume that no freethinker of the eighteenth century would pronounce the austerities of a Communion Sunday in a Calvinist town an edifying spectacle. It is probable that his relinquishing of dogmatic faith was gradual, and for a time unconscious. It was an age of tepid

belief, except among the Nonjurors and Methodists; and with neither of these groups could he have had the least sympathy. His acquaintance with Hume, and his partiality for the writings of Bayle, are more probable sources of a change of sentiment which was in a way predestined by natural bias and cast of mind. Any occasion would serve to precipitate the result. In any case, this result had been attained some years before the publication of the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*, in 1776. Referring to his preparatory studies for the execution of that work, he says, "As I believed, and as I still believe, that the propagation of the Gospel and the triumph of the Church are inseparably connected with the decline of the Roman monarchy, I weighed the causes and effects of the revolution, and contrasted the narratives and apologies of the Christians themselves with the glances of candour or enmity which the pagans have cast on the rising sects. The Jewish and heathen testimonies, as they are collected and illustrated by Dr. Lardner, directed without superseding my search of the originals, and in an ample dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the Passion I privately drew my conclusions from the silence of an unbelieving age." Here we have the argument which concludes the sixteenth chapter distinctly announced. But the previous travail of spirit is not indicated. Gibbon has marked with precision the stages of his conversion to Romanism. But the following chapters of the history of his religious opinions he has not written, or he has suppressed them, and we can only vaguely guess their outline.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN LONDON.—PARLIAMENT.—THE BOARD OF TRADE.—THE DECLINE AND FALL.—MIGRATION TO LAUSANNE.

GIBBON'S settlement in London as master in his own house did not come too soon. A few more years of anxiety and dependence, such as he had passed of late with his father in the country, would probably have dried up the spring of literary ambition and made him miss his career. He had no tastes to fit him for a country life. The pursuit of farming only pleased him in Virgil's *Georgics*. He seems neither to have liked nor to have needed exercise, and English rural sports had no charms for him. "I never handled a gun, I seldom mounted a horse, and my philosophic walks were soon terminated by a shady bench, where I was long detained by the sedentary amusement of reading or meditation." He was a born *citadin*. "Never," he writes to his friend Holroyd, "never pretend to allure me by painting in odious colours the dust of London. I love the dust, and whenever I move into the Weald it is to visit you, and not your trees." His ideal was to devote the morning, commencing early—at seven, say—to study, and the afternoon and evening to society and recreation, not "disdaining the innocent amusement of a

game at cards." And this plan of a happy life he very fairly realised in his little house in Bentinck Street. The letters that we have of his relating to this period are buoyant with spirits and self-congratulation at his happy lot. He writes to his stepmother that he is every day more satisfied with his present mode of life, which he always believed was most calculated to make him happy. The stable and moderate stimulus of congenial society, alternating with study, was what he liked. The excitement and dissipation of a town life, which purchase pleasure to-day at the expense of fatigue and disgust to-morrow, were as little to his taste as the amusements of the country. In 1772, when he settled in London, he was young in years, but he was old in tastes, and he enjoyed himself with the complacency often seen in healthy old men. "My library," he writes to Holroyd in 1773, "Kensington Gardens, and a few parties with new acquaintance, among whom I reckon Goldsmith and Sir Joshua Reynolds," (poor Goldsmith was to die the year following), "fill up my time, and the monster *ennui* preserves a very respectful distance. By the by, your friends Batt, Sir John Russell, and Lascelles dined with me one day before they set off: *for I sometimes give the prettiest little dinner in the world.*" One can imagine Gibbon, the picture of plumpness and content, doing the honours of his modest household. Still he was never prominent in society, even after the publication of his great work had made him famous. Lord Sheffield says that his conversation was superior to his writings, and in a circle of intimate friends it is probable that this was true. But in the free encounter of wit and argument, the same want of readiness that made him silent in parliament would

most likely restrict his conversational power. It may be doubted if there is a striking remark or saying of his on record. His name occurs in Boswell, but nearly always as a *persona muta*. Certainly the arena where Johnson and Burke encountered each other was not fitted to bring out a shy and not very quick man. Against Johnson he manifestly harboured a sort of grudge, and if he ever felt the weight of Ursa Major's paw it is not surprising.

He rather oddly preserved an instance of his conversational skill, as if aware that he would not easily get credit for it. The scene was in Paris. "At the table of my old friend M. de Foncemagne, I was involved in a dispute with the Abbé de Mably . . . As I might be partial in my own cause, I shall transcribe the words of an unknown critic. 'You were, my dear Theodon, at M. de Foncemagne's house, when the Abbé de Mably and Mr. Gibbon dined there along with a number of guests. The conversation ran almost entirely on history. The Abbé, being a profound politician, turned it while at dessert on the administration of affairs, and as by genius and temper, and the habit of admiring Livy, he values only the republican system, he began to boast of the excellence of republics, being well persuaded that the learned Englishman would approve of all he said and admire the profoundity of genius that had enabled a Frenchman to discover all these advantages. But Mr. Gibbon, knowing by experience the inconveniences of a popular government, was not at all of his opinion, and generously took up the defence of monarchy. The Abbé wished to convince him out of Livy, and by some arguments drawn from Plutarch in favour of the Spartans. Mr. Gibbon, being endowed with a most

excellent memory, and having all events present to his mind, soon got the command of the conversation. The Abbé grew angry, they lost possession of themselves, and said hard things of each other. The Englishman retaining his native coolness, watched for his advantages, and pressed the Abbé with increasing success in proportion as he was more disturbed by passion. The conversation grew warmer, and was broken off by M. de Foncemagne's rising from table and passing into the parlour, where no one was tempted to renew it."

But if not brilliant in society, he was very *répandu*, and was welcomed in the best circles. He was a member of Boodle's, White's, Brooks's, and Almack's,[1] and "there were few persons in the literary or political world to whom he was a stranger." It is to be regretted that the best sketch of him at this period borders on caricature. "The learned Gibbon," says Colman, "was a curious counterbalance to the learned (may I not say the less learned) Johnson. Their manners and tastes, both in writing and conversation, were as different as their habiliments. On the day I first sat down with Johnson in his rusty-brown suit and his black worsted stockings, Gibbon was placed opposite to me in a suit of flowered velvet, with a bag and sword. Each had his measured phraseology, and Johnson's famous parallel between Dryden and Pope might be loosely parodied in reference to himself and Gibbon. Johnson's style was grand, and Gibbon's elegant: the stateliness of the former was sometimes pedantic, and the latter was occasionally finical. Johnson marched to kettledrums and trumpets,

[1] Not the assembly-room of that name, but a gaming-club where the play was high. I find no evidence that Gibbon ever yielded to the prevalent passion for gambling.

Gibbon moved to flutes and hautboys. Johnson hewed passages through the Alps, while Gibbon levelled walks through parks and gardens. Mauled as I had been by Johnson, Gibbon poured balm upon my bruises by condescending once or twice in the course of the evening to talk with me. The great historian was light and playful, suiting his matter to the capacity of the boy: but it was done *more suo*—still his mannerism prevailed, still he tapped his snuff-box, still he smirked and smiled, and rounded his periods with the same air of good-breeding, as if he were conversing with men. His mouth, mellifluous as Plato's, was a round hole nearly in the centre of his visage." (Quoted in Croker's *Boswell*.)

Now and then he even joins in a masquerade, "the finest thing ever seen," which costs two thousand guineas. But the chief charm of it to him seems to have been the pleasure that it gave to his Aunt Porten. These little vanities are however quite superficial, and are never allowed to interfere with work.

Now indeed he was no loiterer. In three years after his settlement in London he had produced the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*: an amount of diligence which will not be underrated by those who appreciate the vast difference between commencing and continuing an undertaking of that magnitude. "At the outset," he says, "all was dark and doubtful; even the title of the work, the true æra of the decline and fall of the empire, the limits of the Introduction, the division of the chapters, and the order of the narrative,—and I was often tempted to cast away the labour of seven years;"—alternations no doubt of hope and despair familiar to every sincere and competent

student. But he had taken the best and only reliable means of securing himself from the danger of these fluctuations of spirit. He finished his reading and preparation before he began to write, and when he at last put pen to paper his course lay open before him, with no fear of sudden and disquieting stoppages arising from imperfect knowledge and need of further inquiry. It is a pity that we cannot follow the elaboration of the work in detail. That portion of his Memoirs in which he speaks of it is very short and fragmentary, and the defect is not supplied by his letters. He seems to have worked with singular ease and mastery of his subject, and never to have felt his task as a strain or a fatigue. Even his intimate friends were not aware that he was engaged on a work of such magnitude, and it is amusing to see his friend Holroyd warn him against a hasty and immature publication when he learned that the book was in the press. He had apparently heard little of it before. This alone would show with what ease and smoothness Gibbon must have worked. He had excellent health—a strange fact after his sickly childhood; society unbent his mind instead of distracting it; his stomach was perfect—perhaps too good, as about this time he began to be admonished by the gout. He never seems to have needed change. "Sufficient for the summer is the evil thereof, viz., one distant country excursion." There was an extraordinary difference in this respect between the present age and those which went before it; restlessness and change of scene have become almost a necessity of life with us, whereas our ancestors could continue healthy and happy for months and years without stirring from home. What is there to explain the change? We must not pretend that we

work harder than they did.[1] However, Gibbon was able to keep himself in good condition with his long spell of work in the morning, and his dinner-parties at home or elsewhere in the afternoon, and to have kept at home as much as he could. Whenever he went away to the country, it was on invitations which he could not well refuse. The result was a leisurely, unhasting fulness of achievement, calm stretches of thorough and contented work, which have left their marks on the *Decline and Fall*. One of its charms is a constant good humour and complacency; not a sign is visible that the writer is pressed for time, or wants to get his performance out of hand; but, on the contrary, a calm lingering over details, sprightly asides in the notes, which the least hurry would have suppressed or passed by, and a general impression conveyed of thorough enjoyment in the immensity of the labour.

One would have liked to see this elaboration more clearly, to have been allowed a glimpse into his workshop while he was so engaged. Unfortunately the editor of his journals has selected the relatively unimportant records of his earlier studies, and left us in the dark as regards this far more interesting period. He was such an indefatigable diarist that it is unlikely that he neglected to keep a journal in this crisis of his studies. But it has not been published, and it may have been destroyed. All that we have is this short paragraph in his Memoirs:—

"The classics, as low as Tacitus and the younger Pliny and

[1] The most remarkable instance of all is the case of Newton, who, according to Dr. Whewell, resided in Trinity College "for thirty-five years without the interruption of a month."—*Hist. of the Inductive Sciences*, vol. ii. book vii.

Juvenal, were my old and familiar companions. I insensibly plunged into the ocean of the Augustan history, and in the descending series I investigated, with my pen almost always in my hand, the original records, both Greek and Latin, from Dion Cassius to Ammianus Marcellinus, from the reign of Trajan to the last age of the Western Cæsars. The subsidiary rays of medals and inscriptions of geography and chronology, were thrown on their proper objects, and I applied the collections of Tillemont to fix and arrange within my reach the loose and scattered atoms of historical information. Through the darkness of the middle ages I explored my way in the *Annals and Antiquities of Italy* of the learned Muratori, and diligently compared them with the parallel or transverse lines of Sigonius and Maffei, Baronius and Pagi, till I almost grasped the ruins of Rome in the fourteenth century, without suspecting that this final chapter must be attained by the labour of six quartos and twenty years."

When the time for composition arrived, he showed a fastidiousness which was full of good augury. "Three times did I compose the first chapter, and twice the second and third, before I was tolerably satisfied with their effect." His hand grew firmer as he advanced. But the two final chapters interposed a long delay, and needed "three successive revisals to reduce them from a volume to their present size." Gibbon spent more time over his first volume than over any one of the five which followed it. To these he devoted almost regularly two years apiece, more or less, whereas the first cost him three years—so disproportionately difficult is the start in matters of this kind.

While engaged in the composition of the first volume, he became a member of Parliament. One morning at half past seven, "as he was destroying an army of barbarians," he heard a double rap at his door. It was a friend who came to inquire if he was desirous of

entering the House of Commons. The answer may be imagined, and he took his seat as member for the borough of Liskeard after the general election in 1774.

Gibbon's political career is the side of his history from which a friendly biographer would most readily turn away. Not that it was exceptionally ignoble or self-seeking if tried by the standard of the time, but it was altogether commonplace and unworthy of him. The fact that he never even once opened his mouth in the House is not in itself blameworthy, though disappointing in a man of his power. It was indeed laudable enough if he had nothing to say. But why had he nothing to say? His excuse is timidity and want of readiness. We may reasonably assume that the cause lay deeper. With his mental vigour he would soon have overcome such obstacles if he had really wished and tried to overcome them. The fact is that he never tried because he never wished. It is a singular thing to say of such a man, but nevertheless true, that he had no taste or capacity whatever for politics. He lived at one of the most exciting periods of our history; he assisted at debates in which constitutional and imperial questions of the highest moment were discussed by masters of eloquence and state policy, and he hardly appears to have been aware of the fact. It was not that he despised politics as Walpole affected to do, or that he regarded party struggles as "barbarous and absurd faction," as Hume did; still less did he pass by them with the supercilious indifference of a mystic whose eyes are fixed on the individual spirit of man as the one spring of good and evil. He never rose to the level of the ordinary citizen or even partisan, who takes an

exaggerated view perhaps of the importance of the politics of the day, but who at any rate thereby shows a sense of social solidarity and the claims of civic communion. He called himself a Whig, but he had no zeal for Whig principles. He voted steadily with Lord North, and quite approved of taxing and coercing America into slavery; but he had no high notions of the royal prerogative, and was lukewarm in this as in everything. With such absence of passion one might have expected that he would be at least shrewd and sagacious in his judgments on politics. But he is nothing of the kind. In his familiar letters he reserves generally a few lines for parliamentary gossip, amid chat about the weather and family business. He never approaches to a broad survey of policy, or expresses serious and settled convictions on home or foreign affairs. Throughout the American war he never seems to have really made up his mind on the nature of the struggle, and the momentous issues that it involved. Favourable news puts him in high spirits, which are promptly cooled by the announcement of reverses; not that he ever shows any real anxiety or despondency about the commonwealth. His opinions on the subject are at the mercy of the last mail. It is disappointing to find an elegant trifler like Horace Walpole not only far more discerning in his appreciation of such a crisis, but also far more patriotically sensitive as to the wisdom of the means of meeting it, than the historian of Rome. Gibbon's tone often amounts to levity, and he chronicles the most serious measures with an unconcern really surprising. "In a few days we stop the ports of New England. I cannot write volumes: but I am more and more convinced that with firmness all may go well: yet I

sometimes doubt." (February 8, 1775.) "Something will be done this year; but in the spring the force of the country will be exerted to the utmost: Scotch Highlanders, Irish Papists, Hanoverians, Canadians, Indians, &c., will all in various shapes be employed." (August 1, 1775.) "What think you of the season, of Siberia is it not? A pleasant campaign in America." (January 29, 1776.) At precisely the same time the sagacious coxcomb of Strawberry Hill was writing thus: "The times are indeed very serious. Pacification with America is not the measure adopted. More regiments are ordered thither, and to-morrow a plan, I fear equivalent to a declaration of war, is to be laid before both Houses. They are bold ministers methinks who do not hesitate on civil war, in which victory may bring ruin, and disappointment endanger their heads . . . Acquisition alone can make burdens palatable, and in a war with our own colonies we must inflict instead of acquiring them, and we cannot recover them without undoing them. I am still to learn wisdom and experience, if these things are not so." (Letter to Mann, January 25, 1775.) "A war with our colonies, which is now declared, is a proof how much influence jargon has on human actions. A war on our own trade is popular." (February 15, 1775.) "The war with America goes on briskly, that is as far as voting goes. A great majority in both houses is as brave as a mob ducking a pickpocket. They flatter themselves they shall terrify the colonies into submission in three months, and are amazed to hear that there is no such probability. They might as well have excommunicated them, and left it to the devil to put the sentence into execution." (February 18, 1775.) Not only is Walpole's judgment wiser, but the

elements of a wise judgment were present to him in a way in which they were not so to Gibbon. When the latter does attempt a forecast, he shows, as might be expected, as little penetration of the future as appreciation of the present. Writing from Paris on August 11, 1777, when all French society was ablaze with enthusiasm for America, and the court just on the point of yielding to the current, he is under no immediate apprehensions of a war with France, and "would not be surprised if next summer the French were to lend their cordial assistance to England as the weaker party." The emptiness of his letters as regards home politics perhaps admits of a more favourable explanation, and may be owing to the careful suppression by their editor, Lord Sheffield, of everything of real interest. It is impossible to estimate the weight of this consideration, but it may be great. Still we have a sufficient number of his letters to be able to say that on the whole they are neither thoughtful nor graphic: they give us neither pictures of events nor insight into the times. It must be, however, remembered that Gibbon greatly disliked letter-writing, and never wrote unless he was obliged.

It was no secret that Gibbon wanted a place under government. Moderate as his establishment seems to have been, it was more expensive than he could afford, and he looked, not without warrant, to a supplement of income from one of the rich windfalls which in that time of sinecures were wont to refresh the spirits of sturdy supporters of administration. He had influential friends, and even relatives, in and near the government, and but for his parliamentary nullity he would probably have been provided with a comfortable berth at an early period. But his "sincere and silent vote" was

not valuable enough to command a high price from his patrons. Once only was he able to help them with his pen, when he drew up, at the request of Lords Thurlow and Weymouth, his *Mémoire Justificatif*, in French, in which "he vindicated against the French manifesto the justice of the British arms." It was a service worthy of a small fee, which no doubt he received. He had to wait till 1779, when he had been five years in Parliament, before his cousin Mr. Eliot, and his friend Wedderburne, the Attorney-General, were able to find him a post as one of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations. The Board of Trade, of which he became one of the eight members, survives in mortal memory only from being embalmed in the bright amber of one of Burke's great speeches. "This board, Sir, has had both its original formation and its regeneration in a job. In a job it was conceived, and in a job its mother brought it forth. . . . This board is a sort of temperate bed of influence: a sort of gently ripening hothouse, where eight members of Parliament receive salaries of a thousand a year for a certain given time, in order to mature at a proper season a claim to two thousand, granted for doing less" (*Speech on Economical Reform*). Gibbon, with entire good humour, acknowledges the justice of Burke's indictment, and says he was "heard with delight, even by those whose existence he proscribed." After all, he only enjoyed the emolument of his office for three years, and he places that emolument at a lower figure than Burke did. He could not have received more than between two and three thousand pounds of public money; and when we consider what manner of men have fattened on the national purse, it would be churlish to grudge that

small sum to the historian of the *Decline and Fall*. The misfortune is that, reasonably or otherwise, doubts were raised as to Gibbon's complete straightforwardness and honourable adhesion to party ties in accepting office. He says himself: "My acceptance of a place provoked some of the leaders of opposition with whom I had lived in habits of intimacy, and I was most unjustly accused of deserting a party in which I had never enlisted." There is certainly no evidence that those who were most qualified to speak, those who gave him the place and reckoned on his vote, ever complained of want of allegiance. On the other hand, Gibbon's own letter to Edward Elliot, accepting the place, betrays a somewhat uneasy conscience. He owns that he was far from approving all the past measures of the administration, even some of those in which he himself had silently concurred; that he saw many capital defects in the characters of some of the present ministers, and was sorry that in so alarming a situation of public affairs the country had not the assistance of several able and honest men who were now in opposition. Still, for various reasons, he did not consider himself in any way implicated, and rather suspiciously concludes with an allusion to his pecuniary difficulties and a flourish. "The addition of the salary which is now offered will make my situation perfectly easy, but I hope that you will do me the justice to believe that my mind could not be so unless I were conscious of the rectitude of my conduct."

The strongest charge against Gibbon in reference to this matter is asserted to come from his friend Fox, in this odd form. "In June 1781, Mr. Fox's library came to be sold. Amongst his other books the first volume

of Mr. Gibbon's history was brought to the hammer. In the blank leaf of this was a note in the handwriting of Mr. Fox, stating a remarkable declaration of our historian at a well-known tavern in Pall Mall, and contrasting it with Mr. Gibbon's political conduct afterwards. 'The author,' it observed, 'at Brooks's said that there was no salvation for this country until six heads of the principal persons in administration' (Lord North being then prime minister) 'were laid upon the table. Yet,' as the observation added, 'eleven days afterwards this same gentleman accepted a place of a lord of trade under these very ministers, and has acted with them ever since.'" It is impossible to tell what amount of truth there is in this story, and not very important to inquire. It rests on the authority of a strong personal enemy, and the cordial intimacy which ever subsisted between Gibbon and Fox seems to show that it was more calumny. Perhaps the fact that Gibbon had really no opinions in politics may have led persons of opposite parties to think that he agreed with them more than he did, and when he merely followed his own interest, they may have inferred that he was deserting their principles. After losing his post on the Board of Trade he still hoped for Government employ, "either a secure seat at the Board of Customs or Excise," or in a diplomatic capacity. He was disappointed. If Lord Sheffield is to be believed, it was his friend Fox who frustrated his appointment as secretary of embassy at Paris, when he had been already named to that office.

The way in which Gibbon acted and afterwards spoke in reference to the celebrated Coalition gives perhaps the best measure of his political calibre. He voted

among the rank and file of Lord North's followers for the Coalition with meek subserviency. He speaks of a "principle of gratitude" which actuated him on this occasion. Lord North had given him his seat, and if a man's conscience allows him to think rather of his patron than of his country, there is nothing to be said, except that his code of political ethics is low. We may admit that his vote was pledged; but there is also no doubt that any gratitude that there was in the matter was stimulated by a lively sense of favours to come. The Portland ministry had not been long in office when he wrote in the following terms to his friend Deyverdun: "You have not forgotten that I went into Parliament without patriotism and without ambition, and that all my views tended to the convenient and respectable place of a lord of trade. This situation I at length obtained. I possessed it for three years, from 1779 to 1782, and the net produce, which amounted to 750*l.* sterling, augmented my income to my wants and desires. But in the spring of last year the storm burst over our heads. Lord North was overthrown, your humble servant turned out, and even the Board of Trade, of which I was a member, abolished and broken up for ever by Mr. Burke's reform. To complete my misfortunes, I still remain a member of the Lower House. At the end of the last Parliament, Mr. Eliot withdrew his nomination. But the favour of Lord North facilitated my re-election, and gratitude imposed on me the duty of making available for his service the rights which I held in part from him. That winter we fought under the allied standards of Lord North and Mr. Fox: we triumphed over Lord Shelburne and the peace, and my friend (*i.e.* Lord North) remounted his steed in the quality

of a secretary of state. Now he can easily say to me, 'It was a great deal for me, it was nothing for you;' and in spite of the strongest assurances, I have too much reason to allow me to have much faith. With great genius and very respectable talents, he has now neither the title nor the credit of prime minister; more active colleagues carry off the most savoury morsels which their voracious creatures immediately devour; our misfortunes and reforms have diminished the number of favours; either through pride or through indolence I am but a bad suitor, and if at last I obtain something, it may perhaps be on the eve of a fresh revolution, which will in an instant snatch from me that which has cost me so many cares and pains."

Such a letter speaks for itself. Gibbon might well say that he entered parliament without patriotism and without ambition. The only redeeming feature is the almost cynical frankness with which he openly regards politics from a personal point of view. However, it may be pleaded that the letter was written to a bosom friend at a moment of great depression, and when Gibbon's pecuniary difficulties were pressing him severely. The Coalition promised him a place, and that was enough; the contempt for all principle which had brought it about was not thought of. But even this minute excuse does not apply to the way in which, years after, when he was in comfort at Lausanne, he refers to the subject in his Memoirs. The light in which the Coalition deserved to be regarded was clear by that time. Yet he speaks of it, not only without blame or regret, but contrives to cast suspicion on the motives of those who were disgusted by it, and bestowed their allegiance elsewhere.

"It is not the purpose of this narrative to expatiate on the public or secret history of the times: the schism which followed the death of the Marquis of Rockingham, the appointment of the Earl of Shelbourne, the resignation of Mr. Fox and his famous coalition with Lord North. But I may assert with some degree of assurance that in their political conflict those great antagonists had never felt any personal animosity to each other, that their reconciliation was easy and sincere, and that their friendship has never been clouded by the shadow of suspicion or jealousy. The *most violent* or *venal* of their respective followers embraced this fair occasion of revolt, but their alliance still commanded a majority of the House of Commons, the peace was censured, Lord Shelbourne resigned, and the two friends knelt on the same cushion to take the oath of secretary of state. From a principle of gratitude I adhered to the Coalition; my vote was counted in the day of battle, but I was overlooked in the division of the spoil."

From this we learn that it was only the *violent* and the *venal* who disapproved of the Coalition. One would like to know how Gibbon explained the fact that at the general election of 1784 no less than one hundred and sixty of the supporters of the Coalition lost their seats, and that Fox's political reputation was all but irretrievably ruined from this time forward.

Meanwhile he had not neglected his own proper work. The first volume of his history was published in February, 1776. It derived, he says, "more credit from the name of the shop than from that of the author." In the first instance he intended to print only five hundred copies, but the number was doubled by the "prophetic taste" of his printer, Mr. Strahan. The book was received with a burst of applause—it was a *succès fou*. The first impression was exhausted in a few days, and a second and third edition were scarcely adequate to the

demand. The wiser few were as warm in their eulogies as the general public. Hume declared that if he had not been personally acquainted with the author, he should have been surprised by such a performance coming from any Englishman in that age. Dr. Robertson, Adam Ferguson, and Horace Walpole joined in the chorus. Walpole betrays an amusing mixture of admiration and pique at not having found the author out before. "I know him a little, and never suspected the extent of his talents; for he is perfectly modest, or I want penetration, which I know too; but I intend to know him a great deal more." He oddly enough says that Gibbon was the "son of a foolish alderman," which shows at least how little the author was known in the great world up to this time. Now, however, society was determined to know more of him, the surest proof, not of merit, but of success. It must have been a rather intoxicating moment, but Gibbon had a cool head not easily turned. It would be unfair not to add that he had something much better, a really warm and affectionate regard for old friends, the best preservative against the fumes of flattery and sudden fame. Holroyd, Deyverdun, Madame Necker were more to him than all the great people with whom he now became acquainted. Necker and his wife came over from Paris and paid him a long visit in Bentinck Street, when his laurels were just fresh. "I live with her" he writes, "just as I used to do twenty years ago, laugh at her Paris varnish, and oblige her to become a simple reasonable Suissesse. The man, who might read English husbands lessons of proper and dutiful behaviour, is a sensible, good-natured creature" The next year he returned the visit to Paris. His fame had preceded him, and he

received the cordial but discriminating welcome which the *ancien régime* at that time specially reserved for *gens d'esprit*. Madame du Deffand writes to Walpole, "Mr. Gibbon has the greatest success here: it is quite a struggle to get him." He did not deny himself a rather sumptuous style of living while in Paris. Perhaps the recollection of the unpleasant effect of his English clothes and the long waists of the French on his former visit dwelt in his mind, for now, like Walpole, he procured a new outfit at once. "After decking myself out with silks and silver, the ordinary establishment of coach, lodgings, servants, eating, and pocket expenses, does not exceed 60*l.* per month. Yet I have two footmen in handsome liveries behind my coach, and my apartment is hung with damask."

The remainder of his life in London has nothing important. He persevered assiduously with his history, and had two more quartos ready in 1781. They were received with less enthusiasm than the first, although they were really superior. Gibbon was rather too modestly inclined to agree with the public and "to believe that, especially in the beginning, they were more prolix and less entertaining" than the previous volume. He also wasted some weeks on his vindication of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of that volume, which had excited a host of feeble and ill-mannered attacks. His defence was complete, and in excellent temper. But the piece has no permanent value. His assailants were so ignorant and silly that they gave no scope for a great controversial reply. Neither perhaps did the subject admit of it. A literary war generally makes people think of Bentley's incomparable *Phalaris*. But that was almost a unique occasion and victory in the history

of letters. Bentley himself, the most pugnacious of men, never found such another.

And so the time glided by, till we come to the year 1783. Lord North had resigned office, the Board of Trade was abolished, and Gibbon had lost his convenient salary. The outlook was not pleasant. The seat on the Board of Customs or Excise with which his hopes had been for a time kept up, receded into a remote distance, and he came to the conclusion "that the reign of pensions and sinecures was at an end." It was clearly necessary to take some important step in the way of retrenchment. After he had lost his official income, his expenses exceeded his revenue by something like four hundred pounds. A less expensive style of living in London never seems to have presented itself as an alternative. So, like many an Englishman before and since, he resolved to go abroad to economise.

His old friend Deyverdun was now settled in a comfortable house at Lausanne, overlooking the Lake of Geneva. They had not met for eight years. But the friendship had begun a quarter of a century before, in the old days when Gibbon was a boarder in Pavillard's house, and the embers of old associations only wanted stirring to make them shoot up into flame. In a moment of expansion Gibbon wrote off a warm and eager letter to his friend, setting forth his unsatisfactory position, and his wish and even necessity to change it. He gradually and with much delicacy discloses his plan, that he and Deyverdun, both now old bachelors, should combine their solitary lives in a common household and carry out an old project, often discussed in younger days, of living together. "You live in a charming house. I see from here my apart-

ment, the rooms we shall share with one another, our table, our walks. But such a marriage is worthless unless it suits both parties, and I easily feel that circumstances, new tastes, and connections may frustrate a design which appeared charming in the distance. To settle my mind and to avoid regrets, you must be as frank as I have been, and give me a true picture, external and internal, of George Deyverdun."

This letter, written in fluent and perfect French, is one of the best that we have of Gibbon. Deyverdun answered promptly, and met his friend's advances with at least equal warmth. The few letters that have been preserved of his connected with this subject give a highly favourable idea of his mind and character, and show he was quite worthy of the long and constant attachment that Gibbon felt for him. He cannot express the delight he has felt at his friend's proposal; by the rarest piece of good fortune, it so happens that he himself is in a somewhat similar position of uncertainty and difficulty; a year ago Gibbon's letter would have given him pleasure, now it offers assistance and support. After a few details concerning the tenant who occupies a portion of his house, he proceeds to urge Gibbon to carry out the project he had suggested, to break loose from parliament and politics, for which he was not fit, and to give himself up to the charms of study and friendship. "Call to mind, my dear friend," he goes on, "that I saw you enter parliament with regret, and I think I was only too good a prophet. I am sure that career has caused you more privations than joys, more pains than pleasures. Ever since I have known you I have been convinced that your happiness lay in your study and in society, and that any path which led you

elsewhere was a departure from happiness." Through nine pages of gentle and friendly eloquence Deyverdun pursues his argument to induce his friend to clinch the bargain. "I advise you not only not to solicit a place, but to refuse one if it were offered to you. Would a thousand a year make up to you for the loss of five days a week? . . . . By making this retreat to Switzerland, besides the beauty of the country and the pleasures of its society, you will acquire two blessings which you have lost, liberty and competence. You will also be useful, your works will continue to enlighten us, and, independently of your talents, the man of honour and refinement is never useless." He then skilfully exhibits the attractions he has to offer. "You used to like my house and garden; what would you do now? On the first floor, which looks on the declivity of Ouchy, I have fitted up an apartment which is enough for me. I have a servant's room, two *salons*, two cabinets. On a level with the terrace two other *salons*, of which one serves as a dining-room in summer, and the other a drawing-room for company. I have arranged three more rooms between the house and the coachhouse, so that I can offer you all the large apartment, which consists actually of eleven rooms, great and small, looking east and south, not splendidly furnished, I allow, but with a certain elegance which I hope you will like. The terrace is but little altered . . . . it is lined from end to end with boxes of orange-trees. The vine-trellis has prospered, and extends nearly to the end. I have purchased the vineyard below the garden, and in front of the house made it into a lawn, which is watered by the water of the fountain . . . . In a word, strangers come to see the place, and in spite of my pompous description

of it I think you will like it . . . . If you come, you will find a tranquillity which you cannot have in London, and a friend who has not passed a single day without thinking of you, and who, in spite of his defects, his foibles, and his inferiority, is still one of the companions who suits you best."

More letters followed from both sides in a similar strain. Yet Gibbon quailed before a final resolution. His aunt, Mrs. Porten, his mother, Mrs. Gibbon, his friend, Lord Sheffield, all joined in deprecating his voluntary exile. "That is a nonsensical scheme," said the latter, "you have got into your head of returning to Lausanne—a pretty fancy; you remember how much you liked it in your youth, but now you have seen more of the world, and if you were to try it again you would find yourself woefully disappointed." Deyverdun, with complete sympathy, begged him not to be in too great a hurry to decide on a course which he himself desired so much. "I agree with you," he wrote to Gibbon, "that this is a sort of marriage, but I could never forgive myself if I saw you dissatisfied in the sequel, and in a position to reproach me." Gibbon felt it was a case demanding decision of character, and he came to a determination with a promptitude and energy not usual with him. He promised Deyverdun in the next letter an ultimatum, stating whether he meant to *go* or to *stay*, and a week after he wrote, "I go." He had prudently refrained from consulting Lord Sheffield during this critical period, knowing that his certain disapprobation of the scheme would only complicate matters and render decision more difficult. Then he wrote, "I have given Deyverdun my word of honour to be at Lausanne at the beginning of October, and no power of persuasion

can divert me from this *irrevocable* resolution, which I am every day proceeding to execute."

This was no exaggeration. He cancelled the lease of his house in Bentinck Street, packed the more necessary portion of his books and shipped them for Rouen, and as his postchaise moved over Westminster Bridge, "bade a long farewell to the *fumum et opes strepitumque Romæ*." The only real pang he felt in leaving arose from the "silent grief" of his Aunt Porten, whom he did not hope to see again. Nor did he. He started on September 15, 1783, slept at Dover, was flattered with the hope of making Calais harbour by the same tide in "three hours and a half, as the wind was brisk and fair," but was driven into Boulogne. He had not a symptom of sea-sickness. Then he went on by easy stages through Aire, Bethune, Douay, Cambray, St. Quentin, La Fère, Laon, Rheims, Chalons, St. Dizier, Langres, Besançon, and arrived at Lausanne on the 27th. The inns he found more agreeable to the palate than to the sight or the smell. At Langres he had an excellent bed about six feet high from the ground. He beguiled the time with Homer and Clarendon, talking with his servant, Caplin, and his dog Muff, and sometimes with the French postilions, and he found them the least rational of the animals mentioned.

He reached his journey's end, to alight amid a number of minor troubles, which to a less easy tempered man would have been real annoyances. He found that Deyverdun had reckoned without his host, or rather his tenant, and that they could not have possession of the house for several months, so he had to take lodgings. Then he sprained his ankle, and this brought on a bad attack of the gout, which laid him up completely.

However, his spirits never gave way. In time his books arrived, and the friends got installed in their own house. His satisfaction has then no bounds, with the people, the place, the way of living, and his daily companion. We must now leave him for a short space in the enjoyment of his happiness, while we briefly consider the labours of the previous ten years.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL.

The historian who is also an artist is exposed to a particular drawback from which his brethren in other fields are exempt. The mere lapse of time destroys the value and even the fidelity of his pictures. In other arts correct colouring and outline remain correct, and if they are combined with imaginative power, age rather enhances than diminishes their worth. But the historian lives under another law. His reproduction of a past age, however full and true it may appear to his contemporaries, appears less and less true to his successors. The way in which he saw things ceases to be satisfactory; we may admit his accuracy, but we add a qualification referring to the time when he wrote, the point of view that he occupied. And we feel that what was accurate for him is no longer accurate for us. This superannuation of historical work is not similar to the superseding of scientific work which is ever going on, and is the capital test of progress. Scientific books become rapidly old-fashioned, because the science to which they refer is in constant growth, and a work on chemistry or biology is out of date by reason of incompleteness

or the discovery of unsuspected errors. The scientific side of history, if we allow it to have a scientific side, conforms to this rule, and presents no singularity. Closer inspection of our materials, the employment of the comparative method, occasionally the bringing to light of new authorities—all contribute to an increase of real knowledge, and historical studies in this respect do not differ from other branches of research. But this is not the sole or the chief cause of the renovation and transformation constantly needed in historic work. That depends on the ever-moving standpoint from which the past is regarded, so that society in looking back on its previous history never sees it for long together at quite the same angle, never sees, we may say, quite the same thing. The past changes to us as we move down the stream of time, as a distant mountain changes through the windings of the road on which we travel away from it. To drop figure and use language now becoming familiar, the social organism is in constant growth, and receiving new additions, and each new addition causes us to modify our view of the whole. The historian, in fact, is engaged in the study of an unfinished organism, whose development is constantly presenting him with surprises. It is as if the biologist were suddenly to come upon new and unheard-of species and families which would upset his old classification, or as if the chemist were to find his laws of combination replaced by others which were not only unknown to him, but which were really new and recent in the world. Other inquirers have the whole of the phenomena with which their science is concerned before them, and they may explore them at their leisure. The sociologist has only an instalment, most likely a very small instalment,

of the phenomena with which his science is concerned before him. They have not yet happened, are not yet phenomena, and as they do happen and admit of investigation they necessarily lead to constant modification of his views and deductions. Not only does he acquire new knowledge like other inquirers, but he is constantly having the subject-matter from which he derives his knowledge augmented. Even in modern times society has thrown out with much suddenness rapid and unexpected developments, of such scope and volume that contemporaries have often lost self-possession at the sight of them, and wondered if social order could survive. The Reformation and the French Revolution are cases in point. And what a principal part do these two great events always play in any speculations instituted subsequent to them! How easy it is to see whether a writer lived before the Reign of Terror, or after it, from his gait and manner of approaching social inquiries! Is there any reason to suppose that such mutations are now at an end? None. The probability, well nigh a certainty, is that metamorphoses of the social organism are in store for us which will equal, if they do not vastly exceed, anything that the past has offered.

Considerations of this kind need to be kept in view if we would be just in our appreciation of historical writings which have already a certain age. It is impossible that a history composed a century ago should fully satisfy us now; but we must beware of blaming the writer for his supposed or real shortcomings, till we have ascertained how far they arose from his personal inadequacy to his task, and were not the result of his

chronological position. It need not be said that this remark does not refer to many books which are called histories, but are really contemporary memoirs and original authorities subservient to history proper. The works of Clarendon and Burnet, for instance, can never lose a certain value on this account. The immortal book which all subsequent generations have agreed to call a possession for ever, is the unapproachable ideal of this class. But neither Thucydides nor Clarendon were historians in the sense in which Gibbon was an historian, that is, engaged in the delineation of a remote epoch by the help of such materials as have escaped the ravages of time. It is historians like Gibbon who are exposed to the particular unhappiness referred to a little way back—that of growing out of date through no fault of their own, but through the changed aspect presented by the past in consequence of the movement which has brought us to the present. But if this is the field of historical disaster, it is also the opportunity of historical genius. In proportion as a writer transcends the special limitations of his time, will "age fail to wither him." That he cannot entirely shake off the fetters which fasten him to his epoch is manifest. But in proportion as his vision is clear, in proportion as he has with singleness of eye striven to draw the past with reverent loyalty, will his bondage to his own time be loosened, and his work will remain faithful work for which due gratitude will not be withheld.

The sudden and rapid expansion of historic studies in the middle of the eighteenth century constitutes one of the great epochs in literature. Up to the year 1750 no great historical work had appeared in any modern

language.[1] The instances that seem to make against this remark will be found to confirm it. They consist of memoirs, contemporary documents, in short materials for history, but not history itself. From Froissart and De Comines, or even from the earlier monastic writers to St. Simon (who was just finishing his incomparable Memoirs), history with wide outlook and the conception of social progress and interconnection of events did not exist. Yet history in its simple forms is one of the most spontaneous of human achievements. Stories of mighty deeds, of the prowess and death of heroes, are among the earliest productions of even semi civilised man—the earliest subjects of epic and lyric verse. But this rudimentary form is never more than biographical. With increasing complexity of social evolution it dies away, and history proper, as distinct from annals and chronicle, does not arise till circumstances allow of general and synthetic views, till societies can be surveyed from a sufficient distance and elevation for their movements to be discerned. Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus do not appear till Greece and Rome have reached their highest point of homogeneous national life. The tardy dawn of history in the modern world was owing to its immense complexity. Materials also were wanting. They gradually emerged out of manuscript all over Europe, during what may be called the great pedant age (1550-1650), under the direction of meritorious antiquaries, Camden, Savile, Duchesne, Gale, and others. Still official documents and state papers were wanting, and had they been at hand would hardly have been

[1] Mézeray's great history of France is next to valueless till he reaches the sixteenth century, that was a period bordering on his own. Thuanus deals with contemporary events.

used with competence. The national and religious limitations were still too marked and hostile to permit a free survey over the historic field. The eighteenth century, though it opened with a bloody war, was essentially peaceful in spirit: governments made war, but men and nations longed for rest. The increased interest in the past was shown by the publication nearly contemporary of the great historic collections of Rymer (A.D. 1704), Leibnitz (1707), and Muratori (1723). Before the middle of the century the historic muse had abundant oil to feed her lamp. Still the lamp would probably not have been lighted but for the singular pass to which French thought had come.

From the latter years of Louis XIV. till the third quarter of the eighteenth century was all but closed, France had a government at once so weak and wicked, so much below the culture of the people it oppressed, that the better minds of the nation turned away in disgust from their domestic ignominy, and sought consolation in contemplating foreign virtue wherever they thought it was to be found; in short, they became cosmopolitan. The country which has since been the birthplace of Chauvinism, put away national pride almost with passion. But this was not all. The country whose king was called the Eldest Son of the Church, and with which untold pains had been taken to keep it orthodox, had lapsed into such an abhorrence of the Church and of orthodoxy that anything seemed preferable to them in its eyes.

Thus, as if by enchantment, the old barriers disappeared, both national and religious. Man and his fortunes, in all climes and all ages, became topics of intense interest, especially when they tended to degrade

by contrast the detested condition of things at home. This was the weak side of historical speculation in France: it was essentially polemical; prompted less by genuine interest in the past than by strong hatred of the present. Of this perturbation note must be taken. But it is none the less true that the disengagement of French thought from the narrow limits of nation and creed produced, as it were in a moment, a lofty conception of history such as subsequent ages may equal, but can hardly surpass.

The influence of French thought was European, and nowhere more beneficial than in England. In other countries it was too despotic, and produced in Germany, at least, Lessing's memorable reaction. But the robust national and political life of England reduced it to a welcome flavouring of our insular temperament. The Scotch, who had a traditional connection with France, were the first importers of the new views. Hume, who had practically grown in the same soil as Voltaire, was only three years behind him in the historic field. The *Age of Louis XIV.* was published in 1751, and the first volume of the *History of England* in 1754. Hume was no disciple of Voltaire; he simply wrote under the stimulus of the same order of ideas. Robertson, who shortly followed him, no doubt drew direct inspiration from Voltaire, and his weightiest achievement, the View of the State of Europe, prefixed to his *History of Charles V.*, was largely influenced, if it was not absolutely suggested, by the *Essay on Manners.* But both Hume and Robertson surpassed their masters, if we allow, as seems right, that the French were their masters. The Scotch writers had no quarrel with their country or their age as the French had. One was a

Tory, the other a Whig; and Hume allowed himself to be unworthily affected by party bias in his historical judgment. But neither was tempted to turn history into a covert attack on the condition of things amid which they lived. Hence a calmness and dignity of tone and language, very different from the petulant brilliancy of Voltaire, who is never so happy as when he can make the past look mean and ridiculous, merely because it was the parent of the odious present. But, excellent as were the Scotch historians—Hume, in style nearly perfect; Robertson, admirable for gravity and shrewd sense—they yet left much to be desired. Hume had despatched his five quartos, containing the whole history of England from the Roman period to the Revolution, in nine years. Considering that the subject was new to him when he began, such rapidity made genuine research out of the question. Robertson had the oddest way of consulting his friends as to what subject it would be advisable for him to treat, and was open to proposals from any quarter with exemplary impartiality; this only showed how little the stern conditions of real historic inquiry were appreciated by him. In fact it is not doing them injustice to say that these eminent men were a sort of modern Livies, chiefly occupied with the rhetorical part of their work, and not over inclined to waste their time in ungrateful digging in the deep mines of historic lore. Obviously the place was open for a writer who should unite all the broad spirit of comprehensive survey, with the thorough and minute patience of a Benedictine; whose subject, mellowed by long brooding, should have sought him rather than he it; whose whole previous course of study had been an unconscious preparation for one great effort

which was to fill his life. When Gibbon sat down to write his book, the man had been found who united these difficult conditions.

The decline and fall of Rome is the greatest event in history. It occupied a larger portion of the earth's surface, it affected the lives and fortunes of a larger number of human beings, than any other revolution on record. For it was essentially one, though it took centuries to consummate, and though it had for its theatre the civilised world. Great evolutions and catastrophes happened before it, and have happened since, but nothing which can compare with it in volume and mere physical size. Nor was it less morally. The destruction of Rome was not only a destruction of an empire, it was the destruction of a phase of human thought, of a system of human beliefs, of morals, politics, civilisation, as all these had existed in the world for ages. The drama is so vast, the cataclysm so appalling, that even at this day we are hardly removed from it far enough to take it fully in. The mind is oppressed, the imagination flags under the load imposed upon it. The capture and sack of a town one can fairly conceive: the massacre, outrage, the flaming roofs, the desolation. Even the devastation of a province can be approximately reproduced in thought. But what thought can embrace the devastation and destruction of all the civilised portions of Europe, Africa, and Asia? Who can realise a Thirty Years War lasting five hundred years? a devastation of the Palatinate extending through fifteen generations? If we try to insert into the picture, as we undoubtedly should do, the founding of the new, which was going on beside this destruction of the old, the settling down of the barba-

rian hosts in the conquered provinces, the expansion of the victorious Church, driving paganism from the towns to the country and at last extinguishing it entirely, the effort becomes more difficult than ever. The legend of the Seven Sleepers testifies to the need men felt, even before the tragedy had come to an end, to symbolize in a manageable form the tremendous changes they saw going on around them. But the legend only refers to the changes in religion. The fall of Rome was much more than that. It was the death of the old pagan world and the birth of the new Christian world—the greatest transition in history.

This, and no less than this, is Gibbon's subject.

He has treated it in such a way as even now fills competent judges with something like astonishment. His accuracy, coupled with the extraordinary range of his matter, the variety of his topics, the complexity of his undertaking, the fulness and thoroughness of his knowledge, never failing at any point over the vast field, the ease and mastery with which he lifts the enormous load, are appreciated in proportion to the information and abilities of his critic. One testimonial will suffice. Mr. Freeman says: "That Gibbon should ever be displaced seems impossible. That wonderful man monopolised, so to speak, the historical genius and the historical learning of a whole generation, and left little, indeed, of either for his contemporaries. He remains the one historian of the eighteenth century whom modern research has neither set aside nor threatened to set aside. We may correct and improve from the stores which have been opened since Gibbon's time; we may write again large parts of his story from other and often truer and more wholesome points of view, but the work

of Gibbon as a whole, as the encyclopædic history of 1300 years, as the grandest of historical designs, carried out alike with wonderful power and with wonderful accuracy, must ever keep its place. Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too."

Gibbon's immense scheme did not unfold itself to him at once: he passed through at least two distinct stages in the conception of his work. The original idea had been confined to the decline and fall of the city of Rome. Before he began to write, this had been expanded to the fall of the empire of the West. The first volume, which we saw him publish in the last chapter, was only an instalment, limited to the accession of Constantine, through a doubt as to how his labours would be received. The two following volumes, published in 1781, completed his primitive plan. Then he paused exactly a year before he resolved to carry on his work to its true end, the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. The latter portion he achieved in three volumes more, which he gave to the world on his fifty-first birthday, in 1788. Thus the work naturally falls into two equal parts. It will be more convenient to disregard in our remarks the interval of five years which separated the publication of the first volume from its two immediate companions. The first three volumes constitute a whole in themselves, which we will now consider.

From the accession of Commodus, A.D. 180, to the last of the Western Cæsars, A.D. 476, three centuries elapsed. The first date is a real point of departure, the commencement of a new stage of decay in the empire. The second is a mere official record of the final disappearance of a series of phantom sovereigns, whose

vanishing was hardly noticed. Between these limits the empire passed from the autumnal calm of the Antonine period, through the dreadful century of anarchy between Pertinax and Diocletian, through the relative peace brought about by Diocletian's reforms, the civil wars of the sons of Constantine, the disastrous defeat of Julian, the calamities of the Gothic war, the short respite under Theodosius, the growing anarchy and misery under his incompetent sons, the three sieges of Rome and its sack by the Goths, the awful appearance of Attila and his Huns, the final submergence of the Western Empire under the barbarians, and the universal ruin which marked the close of the fifth century. This was the temporal side of affairs. On the spiritual, we have the silent occult growth of the early Church, the conversion of Constantine, the tremendous conflict of hostile sects, the heresy of Arius, the final triumph of Athanasius, the spread of monasticism, the extinction of paganism. Antiquity has ended, the middle ages have begun.

Over all this immense field Gibbon moves with a striking attitude of power, which arose from his consciousness of complete preparation. What there was to be known of his subject he felt sure that he knew. His method of treatment is very simple, one might say primitive, but it is very effective. He masters his materials, and then condenses and clarifies them into a broad, well filled narrative, which is always or nearly always perfectly lucid through his skill in grouping events and characters, and his fine boldness in neglecting chronological sequence for the sake of clearness and unity of action. It is doing the book injustice to consult it only as a work of reference, or even to read it in detached portions. It should be read through, if we would appreciate the

art with which the story is told. No part can be fairly judged without regard to the remainder. In fact, Gibbon was much more an artist than perhaps be suspected, and less of a philosophic thinker on history than he would have been willing to allow. His shortcomings in this latter respect will be adverted to presently; we are now considering his merits. And among these the very high one of lofty and vigorous narrative stands pre-eminent. The campaigns of Julian, Belisarius, and Heraclius are painted with a dash and clearness which few civil historians have equalled. His descriptive power is also very great. The picture of Constantinople in the seventeenth chapter is, as the writer of these pages can testify, a wonderful achievement, both for fidelity and brilliancy, coming from a man who had never seen the place.

"If we survey Byzantium in the extent which it acquired with the august name of Constantinople, the figure of the imperial city may be represented under that of an unequal triangle. The obtuse point, which advances towards the east and the shores of Asia, meets and repels the waves of the Thracian Bosphorus. The northern side of the city is bounded by the harbour; and the southern is washed by the Propontis, or Sea of Marmora. The basis of the triangle is opposed to the west, and terminates the continent of Europe. But the admirable form and division of the circumjacent land and water cannot, without a more ample explanation, be clearly or sufficiently understood.

"The winding channel through which the waters of the Euxine flow with rapid and incessant course towards the Mediterranean received the appellation of Bosphorus, a name not less celebrated in the history than in the fables of antiquity. A crowd of temples and of votive altars, profusely scattered along its steep and woody banks, attested the unskilfulness, the terrors, and the devotion of the Grecian navigators, who, after the example of the Argonauts, explored the dangers of the inhospitable

Euxine. On these banks tradition long preserved the memory of the palace of Phineus, infested by the obscene Harpies, and of the sylvan reign of Amycus, who defied the son of Leda to the combat of the cestus. The straits of the Bosphorus are terminated by the Cyanean rocks, which, according to the description of the poets, had once floated on the surface of the waters, and were destined by the gods to protect the entrance of the Euxine against the eye of profane curiosity. From the Cyanean rocks to the point and harbour of Byzantium the winding length of the Bosphorus extends about sixteen miles, and its most ordinary breadth may be computed at about one mile and a half. The *new* castles of Europe and Asia are constructed on either continent upon the foundations of two celebrated temples of Serapis and Jupiter Urius. The *old* castles, a work of the Greek emperors, command the narrowest part of the channel, in a place where the opposite banks advance within five hundred yards of each other. These fortresses were destroyed and strengthened by Mahomet the Second when he meditated the siege of Constantinople; but the Turkish conqueror was most probably ignorant that near two thousand years before his reign Darius had chosen the same situation to connect the two continents by a bridge of boats. At a small distance from the old castles we discover the little town of Chrysopolis or Scutari, which may almost be considered as the Asiatic suburb of Constantinople. The Bosphorus, as it begins to open into the Propontis, passes between Byzantium and Chalcedon. The latter of these two cities was built by the Greeks a few years before the former, and the blindness of its founders, who overlooked the superior advantages of the opposite coast, has been stigmatised by a proverbial expression of contempt.

"The harbour of Constantinople, which may be considered as an arm of the Bosphorus, obtained in a very remote period, the denomination of the *Golden Horn*. The curve which it describes might be compared to the horn of a stag, or as it should seem with more propriety, to that of an ox. The epithet of *golden* was expressive of the riches which every wind wafted from the most distant countries into the secure and capacious port of Constantinople. The river Lycus, formed by the conflux of two little streams, pours into the harbour a perpetual supply of fresh

water, which serves to cleanse the bottom and to invite the periodical shoals of fish to seek their retreat in that convenient recess. As the vicissitudes of the tides are scarcely felt in those seas, the constant depth of the harbour allows goods to be landed on the quays without the assistance of boats, and it has been observed that in many places the largest vessels may rest their prows against the houses while their sterns are floating in the water. From the mouth of the Lycus to that of the harbour, this arm of the Bosphorus is more than seven miles in length. The entrance is about five hundred yards broad, and a strong chain could be occasionally drawn across it, to guard the port and the city from the attack of an hostile navy.

"Between the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, the shores of Europe and Asia receding on either side include the Sea of Marmora, which was known to the ancients by the denomination of the Propontis. The navigation from the issue of the Bosphorus to the entrance of the Hellespont is about one hundred and twenty miles. Those who steer their westward course through the middle of the Propontis may at once descry the highlands of Thrace and Bithynia and never lose sight of the lofty summit of Mount Olympus, covered with eternal snows. They leave on the left a deep gulf, at the bottom of which Nicomedia was seated, the imperial residence of Diocletian, and they pass the small islands of Cyzicus and Proconnesus before they cast anchor at Gallipoli, where the sea which separates Asia from Europe is again contracted to a narrow channel.

"The geographers, who with the most skilful accuracy have surveyed the form and extent of the Hellespont, assign about sixty miles for the winding course and about three miles for the ordinary breadth of those celebrated straits. But the narrowest part of the channel is found to the northward of the old Turkish castles between the cities of Sestos and Abydos. It was here that the adventurous Leander braved the passage of the flood for the possession of his mistress. It was here, likewise, in a place where the distance between the opposite banks cannot exceed five hundred paces, that Xerxes imposed a stupendous bridge of boats for the purpose of transporting into Europe an hundred and seventy myriads of barbarians. A sea contracted

within such narrow limits may seem but ill to deserve the singular epithet of *broad*, which Homer, as well as Orpheus, has frequently bestowed on the Hellespont. But our ideas of greatness are of a relative nature; the traveller, and especially the poet, who sailed along the Hellespont, who pursued the windings of the stream and contemplated the rural scenery which appeared on every side to terminate the prospect, insensibly lost the remembrance of the sea, and his fancy painted those celebrated straits with all the attributes of a mighty river flowing with a swift current in the midst of a woody and inland country, and at length through a wide mouth discharging itself into the Ægean or Archipelago. Ancient Troy, seated on an eminence at the foot of Mount Ida, overlooked the mouth of the Hellespont, which scarcely received an accession of waters from the tribute of those immortal rivulets the Simois and Scamander. The Grecian camp had stretched twelve miles along the shore from the Sigæan to the Rhætian promontory, and the flanks of the army were guarded by the bravest chiefs who fought under the banners of Agamemnon. The first of these promontories was occupied by Achilles with his invincible Myrmidons, and the dauntless Ajax pitched his tents on the other. After Ajax had fallen a sacrifice to his disappointed pride and to the ingratitude of the Greeks, his sepulchre was erected on the ground where he had defended the navy against the rage of Jove and Hector, and the citizens of the rising town of Rhætium celebrated his memory with divine honours. Before Constantine gave a just preference to the situation of Byzantium he had conceived the design of erecting the seat of empire on this celebrated spot, from whence the Romans derived their fabulous origin. The extensive plain which lies below ancient Troy towards the Rhætian promontory was first chosen for his new capital; and though the undertaking was soon relinquished, the stately remains of unfinished walls and towers attracted the notice of all who sailed through the straits of the Hellespont.

"We are at present qualified to view the advantageous position of Constantinople; which appears to have been formed by nature for the centre and capital of a great monarchy.

Situated in the forty-first degree of latitude, the imperial city commanded from her seven hills the opposite shores of Europe and Asia; the climate was healthy and temperate; the soil fertile; the harbour secure and capacious; and the approach on the side of the continent was of small extent and easy defence. The Bosphorus and the Hellespont may be considered as the two gates of Constantinople, and the prince who possesses those important passages could always shut them against a naval enemy and open them to the fleets of commerce. The preservation of the eastern provinces may in some degree be ascribed to the policy of Constantine, as the barbarians of the Euxine, who in the preceding age had poured their armaments into the heart of the Mediterranean, soon desisted from the exercise of piracy, and despaired of forcing this insurmountable barrier. When the gates of the Hellespont and Bosphorus were shut, the capital still enjoyed within their spacious inclosure every production which could supply the wants or gratify the luxury of its numerous inhabitants. The sea-coasts of Thrace and Bithynia, which languish under the weight of Turkish oppression, still exhibit a rich prospect of vineyards, of gardens, and of plentiful harvests; and the Propontis has ever been renowned for an inexhaustible store of the most exquisite fish that are taken in their stated seasons without skill and almost without labour. But when the passages of the straits were thrown open for trade, they alternately admitted the natural and artificial riches of the north and south, of the Euxine and the Mediterranean. Whatever rude commodities were collected in the forests of Germany and Scythia, and as far as the sources of the Tanais and Borysthenes; whatsoever was manufactured by the skill of Europe or Asia, the corn of Egypt, the gems and spices of the furthest India, were brought by the varying winds into the port of Constantinople, which for many ages attracted the commerce of the ancient world.

"The prospect of beauty, of safety, and of wealth united in a single spot was sufficient to justify the choice of Constantine. But as some mixture of prodigy and fable has in every age been supposed to reflect a becoming majesty on the origin of great

cities, the emperor was desirous of ascribing his resolution not so much to the uncertain counsels of human policy as to the eternal and infallible decrees of divine wisdom. In one of his laws he has been careful to instruct posterity that in obedience to the commands of God he laid the everlasting foundations of Constantinople, and though he has not condescended to relate in what manner the celestial inspiration was communicated to his mind, the defect of his modest silence has been liberally supplied by the ingenuity of succeeding writers, who describe the nocturnal vision which appeared to the fancy of Constantine as he slept within the walls of Byzantium. The tutelar genius of the city, a venerable matron sinking under the weight of years and infirmities, was suddenly transformed into a blooming maid, whom his own hands adorned with all the symbols of imperial greatness. The monarch awoke, interpreted the auspicious omen, and obeyed without hesitation the will of Heaven. The day which gave birth to a city or a colony was celebrated by the Romans with such ceremonies as had been ordained by a generous superstition: and though Constantine might omit some rites which savoured too strongly of their pagan origin, yet he was anxious to leave a deep impression of hope and respect on the minds of the spectators. On foot, with a lance in his hand, the emperor himself led the solemn procession: and directed the line which was traced as the boundary of the destined capital: till the growing circumference was observed with astonishment by the assistants, who at length ventured to observe that he had already exceeded the most ample measure of a great city. 'I shall still advance,' replied Constantine, 'till HE, the invisible Guide who marches before me, thinks proper to stop.'"

Gibbon proceeds to describe the extent, limits, and edifices of Constantinople. Unfortunately the limits of our space prevent us from giving more than a portion of his brilliant picture.

"In the actual state of the city the palace and gardens of the Seraglio occupy the eastern promontory, the first of the seven hills,

and cover about one hundred and fifty acres of our own measure. The seat of Turkish jealousy and despotism is erected on the foundations of a Grecian republic: but it may be supposed that the Byzantines were tempted by the conveniency of the harbour to extend their habitations on that side beyond the modern limits of the Seraglio. The new walls of Constantine stretched from the port to the Propontis across the enlarged breadth of the triangle, at the distance of fifteen stadia from the ancient fortifications: and with the city of Byzantium they inclosed five of the seven hills, which to the eyes of those who approach Constantinople appear to rise above each other in beautiful order. About a century after the death of the founder the new buildings, extending on one side up the harbour, and on the other the Propontis, already covered the narrow ridge of the sixth and the broad summit of the seventh hill. The necessity of protecting those suburbs from the incessant inroads of the barbarians engaged the younger Theodosius to surround his capital with an adequate and permanent inclosure of walls. From the eastern promontory to the Golden Gate, the extreme length of Constantinople was above three Roman miles; the circumference measured between ten and eleven; and the surface might be computed as equal to about two thousand English acres. It is impossible to justify the vain and credulous exaggerations of modern travellers, who have sometimes stretched the limits of Constantinople over the adjacent villages of the European and even Asiatic coasts. But the suburbs of Pera and Galata, though situate beyond the harbour, may deserve to be considered as a part of the city, and this addition may perhaps authorise the measure of a Byzantine historian, who assigns sixteen Greek (about sixteen Roman) miles for the circumference of his native city. Such an extent may seem not unworthy of an imperial residence. Yet Constantinople must yield to Babylon and Thebes, to ancient Rome, to London, and even to Paris . . .

"Some estimate may be formed of the expense bestowed with imperial liberality on Constantinople, by the allowance of about two millions five hundred thousand pounds for the construction of the walls, the porticoes, and the aqueducts. The forests that overshadowed the shores of the Euxine, and the celebrated

quarries of white marble in the little island of Proconnesus, supplied an inexhaustible stock of materials ready to be conveyed by the convenience of a short water carriage to the harbour of Byzantium. A multitude of labourers and artificers urged the conclusion of the work with incessant toil, but the impatience of Constantine soon discovered that in the decline of the arts the skill as well as the number of his architects bore a very unequal proportion to the greatness of his design. . . The buildings of the new city were executed by such artificers as the age of Constantine could afford, but they were decorated by the hands of the most celebrated masters of the age of Pericles and Alexander. . . . By Constantine's command the cities of Greece and Asia were despoiled of their most valuable ornaments. The trophies of memorable wars, the objects of religious veneration, the most finished statues of the gods and heroes, of the sages and poets of ancient times, contributed to the splendid triumph of Constantinople.

". . . . The Circus, or Hippodrome, was a stately building of about four hundred paces in length and one hundred in breadth. The space between the two *metæ*, or goals, was filled with statues and obelisks, and we may still remark a very singular fragment of antiquity—the bodies of three serpents twisted into one pillar of brass. Their triple heads had once supported the golden tripod which, after the defeat of Xerxes, was consecrated in the temple of Delphi by the victorious Greeks. The beauty of the Hippodrome has been long since defaced by the rude hands of the Turkish conquerors; but, under the similar appellation of Atmeidan, it still serves as a place of exercise for their horses. From the throne whence the emperor viewed the Circensian games a winding staircase descended to the palace, a magnificent edifice, which scarcely yielded to the residence of Rome itself, and which, together with the dependent courts, gardens, and porticoes, covered a considerable extent of ground upon the banks of the Propontis between the Hippodrome and the church of St. Sophia. We might likewise celebrate the baths, which still retained the name of Zeuxippus, after they had been enriched by the magnificence of Constantine with lofty columns, various marbles, and above three score statues of bronze.

But we should deviate from the design of this history if we attempted minutely to describe the different buildings or quarters of the city. . . . A particular description, composed about a century after its foundation, enumerates a capitol or school of learning, a circus, two theatres, eight public and one hundred and fifty-three private baths, fifty-two porticoes, five granaries, eight aqueducts or reservoirs of water, four spacious halls for the meeting of the senate or courts of justice, fourteen churches, fourteen palaces, and four thousand three hundred and eighty-eight houses, which for their size or beauty deserved to be distinguished from the multitude of plebeian habitations."

Gibbon's conception of history was that of a spacious panorama, in which a series of tableaux pass in succession before the reader's eye. He adverts but little, far too little, to that side of events which does not strike the visual sense. He rarely generalises or sums up a widely-scattered mass of facts into pregnant synthetic views. But possibly he owes some of the permanence of his fame to this very defect. As soon as ever a writer begins to support a thesis, to prove a point, he runs imminent danger of one-sidedness and partiality in his presentation of events. Gibbon's faithful transcript of the past has neither the merit nor the drawback of generalisation, and he has come in consequence to be regarded as a common mine of authentic facts to which all speculators can resort.

The first volume, which was received with such warm acclamation, is inferior to those that followed. He seems to have been partly aware of this himself, and speaks of the "concise and superficial narrative from Commodus to Alexander." But the whole volume lacks the grasp and easy mastery which distinguish its successors. No doubt the subject-matter was comparatively meagre and ungrateful. The century between

Commodus and Diocletian was one long spasm of anarchy and violence, which was, as Niebuhr said, incapable of historical treatment. The obscure confusion of the age is aggravated into almost complete darkness by the wretched materials which alone have survived, and the attempt to found a dignified narrative on such scanty and imperfect authorities was hardly wise. Gibbon would have shown a greater sense of historic proportion if he had passed over this period with a few bold strokes, and summed up with brevity such general results as may be fairly deduced. We may say of the first volume that it was tentative in every way. In it the author not only sounded his public, but he was also trying his instrument, running over the keys in preparatory search for the right note. He strikes it full and clear in the two final chapters on the Early Church; these, whatever objections may be made against them on other grounds, are the real commencement of the Decline and Fall.

From this point onwards he marches with the steady and measured tramp of a Roman legion. His materials improve both in number and quality. The fourth century, though a period of frightful anarchy and disaster if compared to a settled epoch, is a period of relative peace and order when compared to the third century. The fifth was calamitous beyond example; but ecclesiastical history comes to the support of secular history in a way which might have excited more gratitude in Gibbon than it did. From Constantine to Augustulus Gibbon is able to put forth all his strength. His style is less superfine, as his matter becomes more copious; and the more definite cleavage of events brought about by the separation between the Eastern

and Western Empires, enables him to display the higher qualities which marked him as an historian.

The merit of his work, it is again necessary to point out, will not be justly estimated unless the considerations suggested at the beginning of this chapter be kept in view. We have to remember that his culture was chiefly French, and that his opinions were those which prevailed in France in the latter half of the eighteenth century He was the friend of Voltaire, Helvétius, and D'Holbach; that is, of men who regarded the past as one long nightmare of crime, imposture, and folly, instigated by the selfish machinations of kings and priests. A strong infusion of the spirit which animated not only Voltaire's *Essay on Manners*, but certain parts of Hume's *History of England* might have been expected as a matter of course. It is essentially absent. Gibbon's private opinions may have been what they will, but he has approved his high title to the character of an historian by keeping them well in abeyance. When he turned his eyes to the past and viewed it with intense gaze, he was absorbed in the spectacle, his peculiar prejudices were hushed, he thought only of the object before him and of reproducing it as well as he could. This is not the common opinion, but, nevertheless, a great deal can be said to support it.

It will be as well to take two concrete tests—his treatment of two topics which of all others were most likely to betray him into deviations from historic candour. If he stands these, he may be admitted to stand any less severe. Let them be his account of Julian, and his method of dealing with Christianity.

The snare that was spread by Julian's apostasy for the philosophers of the last century, and their haste to fall

into it, are well known. The spectacle of a philosopher on the throne who proclaimed toleration, and contempt for Christianity, was too tempting and too useful controversially to allow of much circumspection in handling it. The odious comparisons it offered were so exactly what was wanted for depreciating the Most Christian king and his courtly Church, that all further inquiry into the apostate's merits seemed useless. Voltaire finds that Julian had all the qualities of Trajan without his defects; all the virtues of Cato without his ill-humour; all that one admires in Julius Cæsar without his vices; he had the continency of Scipio, and was in all ways equal to Marcus Aurelius, the first of men. Nay, more. If he had only lived longer, he would have retarded the fall of the Roman Empire, if he could not arrest it entirely. We here see the length to which "polemical fury" could hurry a man of rare insight. Julian had been a subject of contention for years between the hostile factions. While one party made it a point of honour to prove that he was a monster, warring consciously against the Most High, the other was equally determined to prove that he was a paragon of all virtue, by reason of his enmity to the Christian religion. The deep interest attaching to the pagan reaction in the fourth century, and the social and moral problems it suggests, were perceived by neither side, and it is not difficult to see why they were not. The very word reaction, in its modern sense, will hardly be found in the eighteenth century, and the thing that it expresses was very imperfectly conceived. We, who have been surrounded by reactions, real or supposed, in politics, in religion, in philosophy, recognise an old acquaintance in the efforts of the lunited, intense Julian to stem the tide of progress as repre-

sented in the Christian Church. It is a fine instance of the way in which the ever-unfolding present is constantly lighting up the past. Julian and his party were the Ultramontanes of their day in matters of religion, and the Romantics in matters of literature. Those radical innovators and reformers, the Christians, were marching from conquest to conquest, over the old faith, making no concealment of their revolutionary aims and intentions to wipe out the past as speedily as possible. The conservatives of those times, after long despising the reformers, passed easily to fearing them and hating them as their success became threatening. "The attachment to paganism," says Neander, "lingered especially in many of the ancient and noble families of Greece and Rome." Old families, or new rich ones who wished to be thought old, would be sure to take up the cause of ancestral wisdom as against modern innovation. Before Julian came to the throne, a pagan reaction was imminent, as Neander points out. Julian himself was a remarkable man, as men of his class usually are. In the breaking up of old modes of belief, as Mill has said, "the most strong-minded and discerning, next to those who head the movement, are generally those who bring up the rear." The energy of his mind and character was quite exceptional, and if we reflect that he only reigned sixteen months, and died in his thirty-second year, we must admit that the mark he has left in history is very surprising. He and his policy are now discussed with entire calm by inquirers of all schools, and sincere Christians like Neander and Dean Milman are as little disposed to attack him with acrimony, as those of a different way of thought are inclined to make him a subject of unlimited panegyric.

Through this difficult subject Gibbon has found his way with a prudence and true insight which extorted admiration, even in his own day. His account of Julian is essentially a modern account. The influence of his private opinions can hardly be traced in the brilliant chapters that he has devoted to the Apostate. He sees through Julian's weaknesses in a way in which Voltaire never saw or cared to see. His pitiful superstition, his huge vanity, his weak affectation are brought out with an incisive clearness and subtle penetration into character which Gibbon was not always so ready to display. At the same time he does full justice to Julian's real merits. And this is perhaps the most striking evidence of his penetration. An error on the side of injustice to Julian is very natural in a man who, having renounced allegiance to Christianity, yet fully realises the futility of attempting to arrest it in the fourth century. A certain intellectual disdain for the reactionary emperor is difficult to avoid. Gibbon surmounts it completely, and he does so, not in consequence of a general conception of the reactionary spirit, as a constantly emerging element in society, but by sheer historical insight, clear vision of the fact before him. It may be added that nowhere is Gibbon's command of vivid narrative seen to greater advantage than in the chapters that he has devoted to Julian. The daring march from Gaul to Illyricum is told with immense spirit; but the account of Julian's final campaign and death in Persia is still better, and can hardly be surpassed. It has every merit of clearness and rapidity, yet is full of dignity, which culminates in this fine passage referring to the night before the emperor received his mortal wound.

"While Julian struggled with the almost insuperable difficulties of his situation, the silent hours of the night were still devoted to study and contemplation. Whenever he closed his eyes in short and interrupted slumbers, his mind was agitated by painful anxiety; nor can it be thought surprising that the Genius of the empire should once more appear before him, covering with a funereal veil his head and his horn of abundance, and slowly retiring from the Imperial tent. The monarch started from his couch, and, stepping forth to refresh his wearied spirits with the coolness of the midnight air, he beheld a fiery meteor, which shot athwart the sky and suddenly vanished. Julian was convinced that he had seen the menacing countenance of the god of war: the council which he summoned, of Tuscan Haruspices, unanimously pronounced that he should abstain from action; but on this occasion necessity and reason were more prevalent than superstition, and the trumpets sounded at the break of day." [1]

It will not be so easy to absolve Gibbon from the

[1] It is interesting to compare Gibbon's admirable picture with the harsh original Latin of his authority, Ammianus Marcellinus. "Ipse autem ad sollicitam suspensamque quietem paullisper protractus, cum somno (ut solebat) depulso, ad æmulationem Cæsaris Julii quædam sub pellibus scribens, obscuro noctis altitudine sensus cujusdam philosophi teneretur, vidit squalidius, ut confessus est proximis, speciem illam Genii publici, quam quum ad Augustum surgeret culmen, conspexit in Galliis, velata cum capite cornucopia per aulæa tristius discedentem. Et quamquam ad momentum hæsit, stupore defixus, omni tamen superior metu, ventura decretis cælestibus commendabat; relicto humi strato cubili, adulta jam excitus nocte, et numinibus per sacra depulsoria supplicans, flagrantissimam facem cadenti similem visam, aëris parte sulcata evanuisse existimavit: horroreque perfusus est, ne ita aperte minax Martis adparuerit sidus."—*Amm. Marc.* lib. xxv. cap. 2.

charge of prejudice in reference to his treatment of the Early Church. It cannot be denied that in the two famous chapters, at least, which concluded his first volume, he adopted a tone which must be pronounced offensive, not only from the Christian point of view, but on the broad ground of historical equity. His preconceived opinions were too strong for him on this occasion, and obstructed his generally clear vision. Yet a distinction must be made. The offensive tone in question is confined to these two chapters. We need not think that it was in consequence of the clamour they raised that he adopted a different style with reference to church matters in his subsequent volumes. A more creditable explanation of his different tone, which will be presently suggested, is at least as probable. In any case, these two chapters remain the chief slur on his historical impartiality, and it is worth while to examine what his offence amounts to.

Gibbon's account of the early Christians is vitiated by his narrow and distorted conception of the emotional side of man's nature. Having no spiritual aspirations himself, he could not appreciate or understand them in others. Those emotions which have for their object the unseen world and its centre, God, had no meaning for him; and he was tempted to explain them away when he came across them, or to ascribe their origin and effects to other instincts which were more intelligible to him. The wonderland which the mystic inhabits was closed to him, he remained outside of it and reproduced in sarcastic travesty the reports he heard of its marvels. What he has called the secondary causes of the growth of Christianity, were much rather its effects. The first is "the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians"

and their abhorrence of idolatry. With great power of language, he paints the early Christian "encompassed with infernal snares in every convivial entertainment, as often as his friends, invoking the hospitable deities, poured out libations to each other's happiness. When the bride, struggling with well affected reluctance, was forced in hymenæal pomp over the threshold of her new habitation, or when the sad procession of the dead slowly moved towards the funeral pile, the Christian on these interesting occasions was compelled to desert the persons who were dearest to him, rather than contract the guilt inherent in those impious ceremonies." It is strange that Gibbon did not ask himself what was the cause of this inflexible zeal. The zeal produced the effects alleged, but what produced the zeal? He says that it was derived from the Jewish religion, but neglects to point out what could have induced Gentiles of every diversity of origin to derive from a despised race tenets and sentiments which would make their lives one long scene of self-denial and danger. The whole vein of remark is so completely out of date, that it is not worth dwelling on, except very summarily.

The second cause is "the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth." Again we have an effect treated as a cause. "The ancient Christians were animated by a contempt for their present existence, and by a just confidence of immortality." Very true; but the fact of their being so animated was what wanted explaining. Gibbon says it "was no wonder that so advantageous an offer" as that of immortality was accepted. Yet he had just before told us that the ablest orators at the bar and in the senate

of Rome, could expose this offer of immortality to ridicule without fear of giving offence. Whence arose, then, the sudden blaze of conviction with which the Christians embraced it?

The third cause is the miraculous powers *ascribed* to the primitive Church. Gibbon apparently had not the courage to admit that he agreed with his friend Hume in rejecting miracles altogether. He conceals his drift in a cloud of words, suggesting indirectly with innuendo and sneer his real opinion. But this does not account for the stress he lays on the *ascription* of miracles. He seems to think that the claim of supernatural gifts somehow had the same efficacy as the gifts themselves would have had, if they had existed.

The fourth cause is the virtues of the primitive Christians. The paragraphs upon it, Dean Milman considers the most uncandid in all the history, and they certainly do Gibbon no credit. With a strange ignorance of the human heart, he attributes the austere morals of the early Christians to their care for their reputation. The ascetic temper, one of the most widely manifested in history, was beyond his comprehension.

The fifth cause was the union and discipline of the Christian republic. For the last time the effect figures as the cause. Union and discipline we know are powerful, but we know also that they are the result of deep antecedent forces, and that prudence and policy alone never produced them.

It can surprise no one that Gibbon has treated the early Church in a way which is highly unsatisfactory if judged by a modern standard. Not only is it a period which criticism has gone over again and again with a microscope, but the standpoint from which such periods

are observed has materially changed since his day. That dim epoch of nascent faith, full of tender and subdued tints, with a high light on the brows of the Crucified, was not one in which he could see clearly, or properly see at all. He has as little insight into the religious condition of the pagan world, as of the Christian. It is singular how he passes over facts which were plain before him, which he knew quite well, as he knew nearly everything connected with his subject, but the real significance of which he missed. Thus he attributes to the scepticism of the pagan world the easy introduction of Christianity. Misled by the "eloquence of Cicero and the wit of Lucian," he supposes the second century to have been vacant of beliefs, in which a "fashion of incredulity" was widely diffused, and "many were almost disengaged from artificial prejudices." He was evidently unaware of the striking religious revival which uplifted paganism in the age of Hadrian, and grew with the sinking empire: the first stirrings of it may even be discerned in Tacitus, and go on increasing till we reach the theurgy of the Neoplatonists. A growing fear of the gods, a weariness of life and longing for death, a disposition to look for compensation for the miseries of this world to a brighter one beyond the grave—these traits are common in the literature of the second century, and show the change which had come over the minds of men. Gibbon is colour blind to these shades of the religious spirit: he can only see the banter of Lucian.[1] In reference

[1] On the religious revival of the second century, see Hausrath's *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, vol. iii., especially the sections, "Hadrian's Mysticismus" and "Religiöse Tendenzen in Kunst und Literatur," where this interesting subject is handled with a freshness and insight quite remarkable.

to these matters he was a true son of his age, and could hardly be expected to transcend it.

He cannot be cleared of this reproach. On the other hand, we must remember that Gibbon's hard and accurate criticism set a good example in one respect. The fertile fancy of the middle ages had run into wild exaggerations of the number of the primitive martyrs, and their legends had not always been submitted to impartial scrutiny even in the eighteenth century. We may admit that Gibbon was not without bias of another kind, and that his tone is often very offensive when he seeks to depreciate the evidence of the sufferings of the early confessors. His computation, which will allow of "an annual consumption of a hundred and fifty martyrs," is nothing short of cynical. Still he did good service in insisting on chapter and verse and fair historical proof of these frightful stories, before they were admitted. Dean Milman acknowledges so much, and defends him against the hot zeal of M. Guizot, justly adding that "truth must not be sacrificed even to well grounded moral indignation," in which sentiment all now will no doubt be willing to concur.

The difference between the Church in the Catacombs, and the Church in the Palaces at Constantinople or Ravenna, measures the difference between Gibbon's treatment of early Christian history and his treatment of ecclesiastical history. Just as the simple-hearted emotions of God fearing men were a puzzle and an irritation to him, so he was completely at home in exposing the intrigues of courtly bishops and in the metaphysics of theological controversy. His mode of dealing with Church matters from this point onward is hardly ever unfair, and has given rise to few protestations. He

has not succeeded in pleasing everybody. What Church historian ever does? But he is candid, impartial, and discerning. His account of the conversion of Constantine is remarkably just, and he is more generous to the first Christian Emperor than Niebuhr or Neander. He plunges into the Arian controversy with manifest delight, and has given in a few pages one of the clearest and most memorable *résumés* of that great struggle. But it is when he comes to the hero of that struggle, to an historic character who can be seen with clearness, that he shows his wonted tact and insight. A great man hardly ever fails to awaken Gibbon into admiration and sympathy. The "Great Athanasius," as he often calls him, caught his eye at once, and the impulse to draw a fine character, promptly silenced any prejudices which might interfere with faithful portraiture. "Athanasius stands out more grandly in Gibbon, than in the pages of the orthodox ecclesiastical historians"— Dr. Newman has said,—a judge whose competence will not be questioned. And as if to show how much insight depends on sympathy, Gibbon is immediately more just and open to the merits of the Christian community, than he had been hitherto. He now sees "that the privileges of the Church had already revived a sense of order and freedom in the Roman government." His chapter on the rise of monasticism is more fair and discriminating than the average Protestant treatment of that subject. He distinctly acknowledges the debt we owe the monks for their attention to agriculture, the useful trades, and the preservation of ancient literature. The more disgusting forms of asceticism he touches with light irony, which is quite as effective as the vehement denunciations of non-Catholic writers. It must not be forgotten that

his ecclesiastical history derives a great superiority of clearness and proportion by its interweaving with the general history of the times, and this fact of itself suffices to give Gibbon's picture a permanent value even beside the master works of German erudition which have been devoted exclusively to Church matters. If we lay down Gibbon and take up Neander, for instance, we are conscious that with all the greater fulness of detail, engaging candour, and sympathetic insight of the great Berlin Professor, the general impression of the times is less distinct and lasting. There is no specialism in Gibbon; his book is a broad sociological picture in which the whole age is portrayed.

To sum up. In two memorable chapters Gibbon has allowed his prejudices to mar his work as an historian. But two chapters out of seventy-one constitute a small proportion. In the remainder of his work he is as free from bias and unfairness as human frailty can well allow. The annotated editions of Milman and Guizot are guarantees of this. Their critical animadversions become very few and far between after the first volume is passed. If he had been animated by a polemical object in writing; if he had used the past as an arsenal from which to draw weapons to attack the present, we may depend that a swift blight would have shrivelled his labours, as it did so many famous works of the eighteenth century, when the great day of reaction set in. His mild rebuke of the Abbe Raynal should not be forgotten. He admired the *History of the Indies*. It is one of the few books that he has honoured with mention and praise in the text of his own work. But he points out that the "zeal of the philosophic historian for the rights of mankind" had led him into a blunder. It

was not only Gibbon's scholarly accuracy which saved him from such blunders. Perhaps he had less zeal for the rights of mankind than men like Raynal, whose general views he shared. But it is certain that he did not write with their settled *parti pris* of making history a vehicle of controversy. His object was to be a faithful historian, and due regard being had to his limitations, he attained to it.

If we now consider the defects of the *Decline and Fall*—which the progress of historic study, and still more the lapse of time, have gradually rendered visible, they will be found, as was to be expected, to consist in the author's limited conception of society, and of the multitudinous forces which mould and modify it. We are constantly reminded by the tone of remark that he sees chiefly the surface of events, and that the deeper causes which produce them have not been seen with the same clearness. In proportion as an age is remote, and therefore different from that in which a historian writes, does it behove him to remember that the social and general side of history is more important than the individual and particular. In reference to a period adjacent to our own the fortunes of individuals properly take a prominent place, the social conditions amid which they worked are familiar to us, and we understand them and their position without effort. But with regard to a remote age the case is different. Here our difficulty is to understand the social conditions, so unlike those with which we are acquainted, and as society is greater than man, so we feel that society, and not individual men, should occupy the chief place in the picture. Not that individuals are to be suppressed or neglected, but their subordination to the large

historic background must be well maintained. The social, religious, and philosophic conditions amid which they played their parts should dominate the scene, and dwarf by their grandeur and importance the human actors who move across it. The higher historical style now demands what may be called compound narrative, that is narrative having reference to two sets of phenomena —one the obvious surface events, the other the larger and wider, but less obvious, sociological condition. A better example could hardly be given than Grote's account of the mutilation of the Hermæ. The fact of the mutilation is told in the briefest way in a few lines, but the social condition which overarched it, and made the disfiguring of a number of half-statues "one of the most extraordinary events in Greek history," demands five pages of reflections and commentary to bring out its full significance. Grote insists on the duty "to take reasonable pains to realise in our minds the religious and political associations of the Athenians," and helps us to do it by a train of argument and illustration. The larger part of the strength of the modern historical school lies in this method, and in able hands it has produced great results.

It would be unfair to compare Gibbon to these writers. They had a training in social studies which he had not. But it is not certain that he has always acquitted himself well, even if compared to his contemporaries and predecessors, Montesquieu, Mably, and Voltaire. In any case his narrative is generally wanting in historic perspective and suggestive background. It adheres closely to the obvious surface of events with little attempt to place behind them the deeper sky of social evolution. In many of his crowded chapters one

cannot see the wood for the trees. The story is not lifted up and made lucid by general points of view, but drags or hurries along in the hollow of events, over which the author never seems to raise himself into a position of commanding survey. The thirty-sixth chapter is a marked instance of this defect. But the defect is general. The vigorous and skilful narrative, and a certain grandeur and weightiness of language, make us overlook it. It is only when we try to attain clear and succinct views, which condense into portable propositions the enormous mass of facts collected before us, that we feel that the writer has not often surveyed his subject from a height and distance sufficient to allow the great features of the epoch to be seen in bold outline. By the side of the history of concrete events, we miss the presentation of those others which are none the less events for being vague, irregular, and wide-reaching, and requiring centuries for their accomplishment. Gibbon's manner of dealing with the first is always good, and sometimes consummate, and equal to anything in historical literature. The thirty-first chapter, with its description of Rome, soon to fall a prey to the Goths and Alaric, is a masterpiece, artistic and spacious in the highest degree; though it is unnecessary to cite particular instances, as nearly every chapter contains passages of admirable historic power. But the noble flood of narrative never stops in meditative pause to review the situation, and point out with pregnant brevity what is happening in the sum total, abstraction made of all confusing details. Besides the facts of the time, we seek to have the tendencies of the age brought before us in their flow and expansion, the filiation of events over long periods deduced in clear

sequence, a synoptical view which is to the mind what a picture is to the eye. In this respect Gibbon's method leaves not a little to be desired.

Take for instance two of the most important aspects of the subject that he treated: the barbarian invasions, and the causes of the decline and fall of the Roman empire. To the concrete side of both he has done ample justice. The rational and abstract side of neither has received the attention from him which it deserved. On the interesting question of the introduction of the barbarians into the frontier provinces, and their incorporation into the legions, he never seems to have quite made up his mind. In the twelfth chapter he calls it a "great and beneficial plan." Subsequently he calls it a disgraceful and fatal expedient. He recurs frequently to the subject in isolated passages, but never collects the facts, into a focus, with a view of deducing their real meaning. Yet the point is second to none in importance. Its elucidation throws more light on the fall of Rome than any other considerations whatever. The question is, Whether Rome was conquered by the barbarians in the ordinary sense of the word, conquered. We know that it was not, and Gibbon knew that it was not. Yet perhaps most people rise from reading his book with an impression that the empire succumbed to the invasion of the barbarians, as Carthage, Gaul, and Greece had succumbed to the invasion of the Romans; that the struggle lay between classic Rome and outside uncivilised foes; and that after two centuries of hard fighting the latter were victorious. The fact that the struggle lay between barbarians, who were within and friendly to the empire, and barbarians who were without it, and hostile rather to their more fortunate

brethren, than to the empire which employed them, is implicitly involved in Gibbon's narrative, but it is not explicitly brought out. Romanised Goths, Vandals, and Franks were the defenders, nearly the only defenders, of the empire against other tribes and nations who were not Romanised, and nothing can be more plain than that Gibbon saw this as well as any one since, but he has not set it forth with prominence and clearness. With his complete mastery of the subject he would have done it admirably, if he had assumed the necessary point of view.

Similarly, with regard to the causes of the fall of the empire. It is quite evident that he was not at all unconscious of the deep economic and social vices which undermined the great fabric. Depopulation, decay of agriculture, fiscal oppression, the general prostration begotten of despotism—all these sources of the great collapse may be traced in his text, or his wonderful notes, hinted very often with a flashing insight which anticipates the most recent inquiries into the subject. But these considerations are not brought together to a luminous point, nor made to yield clear and tangible results. They lie scattered, isolated, and barren over three volumes, and are easily overlooked. One may say that generalised and synthetic views are conspicuous by their absence in Gibbon.

But what of that? These reflections, even if they be well founded, hardly dim the majesty of the *Decline and Fall*. The book is such a marvel of knowledge at once wide and minute, that even now, after numbers of labourers have gone over the same ground, with only special objects in view, small segments of the great circle which Gibbon fills alone, his word is still one of

the weightiest that can be quoted. Modern research has unquestionably opened out points of view to which he did not attain. But when it comes to close investigation of any particular question, we rarely fail to find that he has seen it, dropped some pregnant hint about it, more valuable than the dissertations of other men. As Mr. Freeman says, "Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN LAUSANNE.

After the preliminary troubles which met him on his arrival at Lausanne, Gibbon had four years of unbroken calm and steady work, of which there is nothing to record beyond the fact that they were filled with peaceful industry. "One day," he wrote, "glides by another in tranquil uniformity." During the whole period he never stirred ten miles out of Lausanne. He had nearly completed the fourth volume before he left England. Then came an interruption of a year—consumed in the break-up of his London establishment, his journey, the transport of his library, the delay in getting settled at Lausanne. Then he sat down in grim earnest to finish his task, and certainly the speed he used, considering the quality of the work, left nothing to be desired. He achieved the fifth volume in twenty-one months, and the sixth in little more than a year. He had hoped to finish sooner, but it is no wonder that he found his work grow under his hands when he passed from design to execution. "A long while ago, when I contemplated the distant prospect of my work," he writes to Lord Sheffield, "I gave you and myself some hopes of landing

in England last autumn; but alas! when autumn grew near, hills began to rise on hills, Alps on Alps, and I found my journey far more tedious and toilsome than I had imagined. When I look back on the length of the undertaking and the variety of materials, I cannot accuse or suffer myself to be accused of idleness; yet it appeared that unless I doubled my diligence, another year, and perhaps more, would elapse before I could embark with my complete manuscript. Under these circumstances I took, and am still executing, a bold and meritorious resolution. The mornings in winter, and in a country of early dinners, are very concise. To them, my usual period of study, I now frequently add the evenings, renounce cards and society, refuse the most agreeable evenings, or perhaps make my appearance at a late supper. By this extraordinary industry, which I never practised before, and to which I hope never to be again reduced, I see the last part of my history growing apace under my hands." He was indeed, as he said, now straining for the goal which was at last reached "on the day, or rather the night, of the 27th of June, 1787. Between the hours of eleven and twelve I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a berceau, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken an

everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future fate of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

A faint streak of poetry occasionally shoots across Gibbon's prose. But both prose and poetry had now to yield to stern business. The printing of three quarto volumes in those days of handpresses was a formidable undertaking, and unless expedition were used the publishing season of the ensuing year would be lost. A month had barely elapsed before Gibbon with his precious cargo started for England. He went straight to his printers. The printing of the fourth volume occupied three months, and both author and publisher were warned that their common interest required a quicker pace. Then Mr. Strahan "fulfilled his engagement, which few printers could sustain, of delivering every week three thousand copies of nine sheets." On the 8th of May, 1788, the three concluding volumes were published, and Gibbon had discharged his debt for the entertainment that he had had in this world.

He returned as speedily as he could to Lausanne, to rest from his labours. But he had a painful greeting in the sadly altered look of his friend Deyverdun. Soon an apoplectic seizure confirmed his forebodings, and within a twelvemonth the friend of his youth, whom he had loved for thirty-three years, was taken away by death (July 4, 1789).[1]

[1] The letter in which Gibbon communicated the sad news to Lord Sheffield was written on the 14th July, 1789, the day of the taking of the Bastille. So "that evening sun of July" sent its beams on Gibbon mourning the dead friend, as well as on "reapers amid peaceful woods and fields, on old women spinning in cottages, on ships far out on the silent main, on balls at the Orangerie of

Gibbon never got over this loss. His staid and solid nature was not given to transports of joy or grief But his constant references to "poor Deyverdun," and the vacancy caused by his loss, show the depth of the wound. "I want to change the scene," he writes, "and, beautiful as the garden and prospect must appear to every eye, I feel that the state of my mind casts a gloom over them: every spot, every walk, every bench recalls the memory of those hours, those conversations, which will return no more. . . . I almost hesitate whether I shall run over to England to consult with you on the spot, and to fly from poor Deyverdun's shade, which meets me at every turn." Not that he lacked attached friends, and of mere society and acquaintance he had more than abundance. He occupied at Lausanne a position of almost patriarchal dignity, "and may be said," writes Lord Sheffield, "to have almost given the law to a set of as willing subjects as any man ever presided over." Soon the troubles in France sent wave after wave of emigrants over the frontiers, and Lausanne had its full share of the exiles. After a brief approval of the reforms in France he passed rapidly to doubt, disgust, and horror at the "new birth of time" there. "You will allow me to be a tolerable historian," he wrote to his stepmother, "yet on a fair review of ancient and modern times I can find none that bear any affinity to the present." The last social evolution was beyond his power of classification. The mingled bewilderment and anger with which he looks out from Lausanne on the revolutionary welter, form an almost amusing contrast to his usual apathy on political matters.

Versailles, where high-rouged dames of the palace are even now dancing with double-jacketed Hussar officers."

He is full of alarm lest England should catch the revolutionary fever. He is delighted with Burke's *Reflections*. "I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry, and I can forgive even his superstition." His wrath waxes hotter at every post. "Poor France! The state is dissolved! the nation is mad." At last nothing but vituperation can express his feelings, and he roundly calls the members of the Convention "devils," and discovers that "democratical principles lead by a path of flowers into the abyss of hell."

In 1790 his friends the Neckers had fled to Switzerland, and on every ground of duty and inclination he was called upon to show them the warmest welcome, and he did so in a way that excited their liveliest gratitude. Necker was cast down in utter despair, not only for the loss of place and power, but on account of the strong animosity which was shown to him by the exiled French, none of whom would set their foot in his house. The Neckers were now Gibbon's chief intimates till the end of his sojourn in Switzerland. They lived at Coppet, and constant visits were exchanged there and at Lausanne. Madame Necker wrote to him frequent letters, which prove that if she had ever had any grievance to complain of in the past, it was not only forgiven, but entirely forgotten. The letters, indeed, testify a warmth of sentiment on her part which, coming from a lady of less spotless propriety, would almost imply a revival of youthful affection for her early lover. "You have always been dear to me," she writes, "but the friendship you have shown to M. Necker adds to that which you inspire me with on so many grounds, and I love you at present with a double affection."—"Come to us when you are restored to health and to yourself; that

moment should always belong to your first and your last friend (*amie*), and I do not know which of those titles is the sweetest and dearest to my heart."—"Near you, the recollections you recalled were pleasant to me, and you connected them easily with present impressions; the chain of years seemed to link all times together with electrical rapidity; you were at once twenty and fifty years old for me. Away from you the different places, which I have inhabited are only the milestones of my life telling me of the distance I have come." With much more in the same strain. Of Madame de Staël Gibbon does not speak in very warm praise. Her mother, who was far from being contented with her, may perhaps have prejudiced him against her. In one letter to him she complains of her daughter's conduct in no measured terms. Yet Gibbon owns that Madame de Staël was a "pleasant little woman;" and in another place says that she was "wild, vain, but good-natured, with a much larger provision of wit than of beauty." One wonders if he ever knew of her childish scheme of marrying him in order that her parents might always have the pleasure of his company and conversation.

These closing years of Gibbon's life were not happy, through no fault of his. No man was less inclined by disposition to look at the dark side of things. But heavy blows fell on him in quick succession. His health was seriously impaired, and he was often laid up for months with the gout. His neglect of exercise had produced its effect, and he had become a prodigy of unwieldy corpulency. Unfortunately his digestion seems to have continued only too good, and neither his own observation nor the medical science of that day

sufficed to warn him against certain errors of regimen which were really fatal. All this time, while the gout was constantly torturing him, he drank Madeira freely. There is frequent question of a pipe of that sweet wine in his correspondence with Lord Sheffield. He cannot bear the thought of being without a sufficient supply, as "good Madeira is now become essential to his health and reputation." The last three years of his residence at Lausanne were agitated by perpetual anxiety and dread of an invasion of French democratic principles, or even of French troops. Reluctance to quit "his paradise" keeps him still, but he is always wondering how soon he will have to fly, and often regrets that he has not done so already. "For my part," he writes, "till Geneva falls, I do not think of a retreat; but at all events I am provided with two strong horses and a hundred louis in gold." Fate was hard on the kindly epicurean, who after his long toil had made his bed in the sun, on which he was preparing to lie down in genial content till the end came. But he feels he must not think of rest; and that, heavy as he is, and irksome to him as it is to move, he must before long be a rover again. Still he is never peevish upon his fortune; he puts the best face on things as long as they will bear it.

He was not so philosophical under the bereavements that he now suffered. His aunt, Mrs. Porten, had died in 1786. He deplored her as he was bound to do, and feelingly regrets and blames himself for not having written to her as often as he might have done since their last parting. Then came the irreparable loss of Deyverdun. Shortly, an old Lausanne friend, M. de Severy, to whom he was much attached, died after a long illness.

Lastly and suddenly, came the death of Lady Sheffield, the wife of his friend Holroyd, with whom he had long lived on such intimate terms that he was in the habit of calling her his sister. The Sheffields, father and mother and two daughters, had spent the summer of 1791 with him at Lausanne. The visit was evidently an occasion of real happiness and *épanchement de cœur* to the two old friends, and supplied Gibbon for nearly two years with tender regrets and recollections. Then, without any warning, he heard of Lady Sheffield's death. In a moment his mind was made up: he would go at once to console his friend. All the fatigue and irksomeness of the journey to one so ailing and feeble, all the dangers of the road lined and perhaps barred by hostile armies, vanished on the spot. Within twelve days he had made his preparations and started on his journey. He was forced to travel through Germany, and in his ignorance of the language he required an interpreter; young de Severy, the son of his deceased friend, joyfully, and out of mere affection for him, undertook the office of courier. "His attachment to me," wrote Gibbon, "is the sole motive which prompts him to undertake this troublesome journey." It is clear that he had the art of making himself loved. He travelled through Frankfort, Cologne, Brussels, Ostend, and was by his friend's side in little more than a month after he had received the fatal tidings. Well might Lord Sheffield say, "I must ever regard it as the most enduring proof of his sensibility, and of his possessing the true spirit of friendship, that, after having relinquished the thought of his intended visit, he hastened to England, in spite of increasing impediments, to soothe me by the most generous sympathy, and to alleviate my domestic

affliction; neither his great corpulency nor his extraordinary bodily infirmities, nor any other consideration, could prevent him a moment from resolving on an undertaking that might have deterred the most active young man. He almost immediately, with an alertness by no means natural to him, undertook a great circuitous journey along the frontier of an enemy worse than savage, within the sound of their cannon, within the range of the light troops of the different armies, and through roads ruined by the enormous machinery of war."

In this public and private gloom he bade for ever farewell to Lausanne. He was himself rapidly approaching

> "The dark portal,
> Goal of all mortal,"

but of this he knew not as yet. While he is in the house of mourning, beside his bereaved friend, we will return for a short space to consider the conclusion of his great work.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST THREE VOLUMES OF THE DECLINE AND FALL.

THE thousand years between the fifth and the fifteenth century comprise the middle age, a period which only recently, through utterly inadequate conceptions of social growth, was wont to be called the dark ages. That long epoch of travail and growth, during which the old field of civilisation was broken up and sown afresh with new and various seed unknown to antiquity, receives now on all hands due recognition, as being one of the most rich, fertile, and interesting in the history of man. The all embracing despotism of Rome was replaced by the endless local divisions and subdivisions of feudal tenure. The multiform rites and beliefs of polytheism were replaced by the single faith and paramount authority of the Catholic Church. The philosophies of Greece were dethroned, and the scholastic theology reigned in their stead. The classic tongues crumbled away, and out of their *débris* arose the modern idioms of France, Italy, and Spain, to which were added in Northern Europe the new forms of Teutonic speech. The fine and useful arts took a new departure; slavery was mitigated into serfdom; industry and commerce became powers in the world as they had never been

before; the narrow municipal polity of the old world was in time succeeded by the broader national institutions based on various forms of representation. Gunpowder, America, and the art of printing were discovered, and the most civilised portion of mankind passed insensibly into the modern era.

Such was the wide expanse which spread out before Gibbon when he resolved to continue his work from the fall of the Western Empire to the capture of Constantinople. Indeed his glance took in a still wider field, as he was concerned as much with the decay of Eastern as of Western Rome, and the long retarded fall of the former demanded large attention to the Oriental populations who assaulted the city and remaining empire of Constantine. So bold an historic enterprise was never conceived as when, standing on the limit of antiquity in the fifth century, he determined to pursue in rapid but not hasty survey the great lines of events for a thousand years, to follow in detail the really great transactions while discarding the less important, thereby giving prominence and clearness to what is memorable, and reproducing on a small scale the flow of time through the ages. It is to this portion of Gibbon's work that the happy comparison has been made, that it resembles a magnificent Roman aqueduct spanning over the chasm which separates the ancient from the modern world. In these latter volumes he frees himself from the trammels of regular annalistic narrative, deals with events in broad masses according to their importance, expanding or contracting his story as occasion requires; now painting in large panoramic view the events of a few years, now compressing centuries into brief outline. Many of his massive chapters afford materials for

volumes, and are well worthy of a fuller treatment than he could give without deranging his plan. But works of greater detail and narrower compass can never compete with Gibbon's history, any more than a county map can compete with a map of England or of Europe.

The variety of the contents of these last three volumes is amazing, especially when the thoroughness and perfection of the workmanship are considered. Prolix compilations or sketchy outlines of universal history have their use and place, but they are removed by many degrees from the *Decline and Fall*, or rather they belong to another species of authorship. It is not only that Gibbon combines width and depth, that the extent of his learning is as wonderful as its accuracy, though in this respect he has hardly a full rival in literature. The quality which places him not only in the first rank of historians, but in a class by himself, and makes him greater than the greatest, lies in his supreme power of moulding into lucid and coherent unity, the manifold and rebellious mass of his multitudinous materials, of coercing his divergent topics into such order that they seem spontaneously to grow like branches out of one stem, clear and visible to the mind. There is something truly epic in these latter volumes. Tribes, nations, and empires are the characters; one after another they come forth like Homeric heroes, and do their mighty deeds before the assembled armies. The grand and lofty chapters on Justinian; on the Arabs; on the Crusades, have a rounded completeness, coupled with such artistic subordination to the main action, that they read more like cantos of a great prose poem than the ordinary staple of historical composition. It may well be questioned whether there is another instance of such

high literary form and finish, coupled with such vast erudition. And two considerations have to be borne in mind, which heighten Gibbon's merit in this respect. (1.) Almost the whole of his subject had been as yet untouched by any preceding writer of eminence, and he had no stimulus or example from his precursors. He united thus in himself the two characters of pioneer and artist. (2.) The barbarous and imperfect nature of the materials with which he chiefly had to work,—dull inferior writers, whose debased style was their least defect. A historian who has for his authorities masters of reason and language such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, and Tacitus is borne up by their genius; apt quotation and translation alone suffice to produce considerable effects; or in the case of subjects taken from modern times, weighty state papers, eloquent debates, or finished memoirs supply ample materials for graphic narrative. But Gibbon had little but dross to deal with. Yet he has smelted and cast it into the grand shapes we see.

The fourth volume is nearly confined to the reign, or rather epoch, of Justinian,—a magnificent subject, which he has painted in his loftiest style of gorgeous narrative. The campaigns of Belisarius and Narses are related with a clearness and vigour that make us feel that Gibbon's merits as a military historian have not been quite sufficiently recognised. He had from the time of his service in the militia taken continued interest in tactics and all that was connected with the military art. It was no idle boast when he said that the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers had not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire. Military matters perhaps occupy a somewhat excessive space in his pages.

Still, if the operations of war are to be related, it is highly important that they should be treated with intelligence, and knowledge how masses of men are moved, and by a writer to whom the various incidents of the camp, the march, and the bivouac, are not matters of mere hearsay, but of personal experience. The campaign of Belisarius in Africa may be quoted as an example.

"In the seventh year of the reign of Justinian, and about the time of the summer solstice, the whole fleet of six hundred ships was ranged in martial pomp before the gardens of the palace. The patriarch pronounced his benediction, the emperor signified his last commands, the general's trumpet gave the signal of departure, and every heart, according to its fears or wishes, explored with anxious curiosity the omens of misfortune or success. The first halt was made at Perintheus, or Heraclea, where Belisarius waited five days to receive some Thracian horses, a military gift of his sovereign. From thence the fleet pursued their course through the midst of the Propontis; but as they struggled to pass the straits of the Hellespont, an unfavourable wind detained them four days at Abydos, where the general exhibited a remarkable lesson of firmness and severity. Two of the Huns who, in a drunken quarrel, had slain one of their fellow-soldiers, were instantly shown to the army suspended on a lofty gibbet. The national dignity was resented by their countrymen, who disclaimed the servile laws of the empire and asserted the free privileges of Scythia, where a small fine was allowed to expiate the sallies of intemperance and anger. Their complaints were specious, their clamours were loud, and the Romans were not averse to the example of disorder and impunity. But the rising sedition was appeased by the authority and eloquence of the general, and he represented to the assembled troops the obligation of justice, the importance of discipline, the rewards of piety and virtue, and the unpardonable guilt of murder, which, in his apprehension, was aggravated rather than excused by the vice of intoxication.

In the navigation from the Hellespont to the Peloponnesus, which the Greeks after the siege of Troy had performed in four days, the fleet of Belisarius was guided in their course by his master-galley, conspicuous in the day by the redness of the sails, and in the night by torches blazing from the masthead. It was the duty of the pilots as they steered between the islands and turned the capes of Malea and Tænarium to preserve the just order and regular intervals of such a multitude. As the wind was fair and moderate, their labours were not unsuccessful, and the troops were safely disembarked at Methone, on the Messenian coast, to repose themselves for a while after the fatigues of the sea. . . . From the port of Methone the pilots steered along the western coast of Peloponnesus, as far as the island of Zacynthus, or Zante, before they undertook the voyage (in their eyes a most arduous voyage) of one hundred leagues over the Ionian sea. As the fleet was surprised by a calm, sixteen days were consumed in the slow navigation. . . At length the harbour of Caucana, on the southern side of Sicily, afforded a secure and hospitable shelter. . . Belisarius determined to hasten his operations, and his wise impatience was seconded by the winds. The fleet lost sight of Sicily, passed before the island of Malta, discovered the capes of Africa, ran along the coast with a strong gale from the north-east, and finally cast anchor at the promontory of Caput Vada, about five days journey to the south of Carthage. . . . . .

"Three months after their departure from Constantinople, the men and the horses, the arms and the military stores were safely disembarked, and five soldiers were left as a guard on each of the ships, which were disposed in the form of a semicircle. The remainder of the troops occupied a camp on the seashore, which they fortified, according to ancient discipline, with a ditch and rampart, and the discovery of a source of fresh water, while it allayed the thirst, excited the superstitious confidence of the Romans. . . The small town of Sullecte, one day's journey from the camp, had the honour of being foremost to open her gates and resume her ancient allegiance; the larger cities of Leptis and Adru-

metum imitated the example of loyalty as soon as Belisarius appeared, and he advanced without opposition as far as Grasse, a palace of the Vandal kings, at the distance of fifty miles from Carthage. The weary Romans indulged themselves in the refreshment of shady groves, cool fountains, and delicious fruits. . . In three generations prosperity and a warm climate had dissolved the hardy virtue of the Vandals, who insensibly became the most luxurious of mankind. In their villas and gardens, which might deserve the Persian name of Paradise, they enjoyed a cool and elegant repose, and after the daily use of the bath, the barbarians were seated at a table profusely spread with the delicacies of the land and sea. Their silken robes, loosely flowing after the fashion of the Medes, were embroidered with gold, love and hunting were the labours of their life, and their vacant hours were amused by pantomimes, chariot-races, and the music and dances of the theatre.

"In a march of twelve days the vigilance of Belisarius was constantly awake and active against his unseen enemies, by whom in every place and at every hour he might be suddenly attacked. An officer of confidence and merit, John the Armenian, led the vanguard of three hundred horse. Six hundred Massagetæ covered at a certain distance the left flank, and the whole fleet, steering along the coast, seldom lost sight of the army, which moved each day about twelve miles, and lodged in the evening in strong camps or in friendly towns. The near approach of the Romans to Carthage filled the mind of Gelimer with anxiety and terror. . . . . .

"Yet the authority and promises of Gelimer collected a formidable army, and his plans were concerted with some degree of military skill. An order was despatched to his brother Ammatas to collect all the forces of Carthage, and to encounter the van of the Roman army at the distance of ten miles from the city : his nephew Gibamund with two thousand horse was destined to attack their left, when the monarch himself, who silently followed, should charge their rear in a situation which excluded them from the aid and even the view of their fleet. But the rashness of Ammatas was fatal to himself and his country. He anticipated the hour of attack, outstripped his

tardy followers, and was pierced with a mortal wound, after he had slain with his own hand twelve of his boldest antagonists. His Vandals fled to Carthage: the highway, almost ten miles, was strewed with dead bodies, and it seemed incredible that such multitudes could be slaughtered by the swords of three hundred Romans. The nephew of Gelimer was defeated after a slight combat by the six hundred Massagetæ; they did not equal the third part of his numbers, but each Scythian was fired by the example of his chief, who gloriously exercised the privilege of his family by riding foremost and alone to shoot the first arrow against the enemy. In the meantime Gelimer himself, ignorant of the event, and misguided by the windings of the hills, inadvertently passed the Roman army and reached the scene of action where Ammatas had fallen. He wept the fate of his brother and of Carthage, charged with irresistible fury the advancing squadrons, and might have pursued and perhaps decided the victory, if he had not wasted those inestimable moments in the discharge of a vain though pious duty to the dead. While his spirit was broken by this mournful office, he heard the trumpet of Belisarius, who, leaving Antonina and his infantry in the camp, pressed forward with his guards and the remainder of the cavalry to rally his flying troops, and to restore the fortune of the day. Much room could not be found in this disorderly battle for the talents of a general; but the king fled before the hero, and the Vandals, accustomed only to a Moorish enemy, were incapable of withstanding the arms and the discipline of the Romans. . . . . .

"As soon as the tumult had subsided, the several parts of the army informed each other of the accidents of the day, and Belisarius pitched his camp on the field of victory, to which the tenth milestone from Carthage had applied the Latin appellation of *Decimus*. From a wise suspicion of the stratagems and resources of the Vandals, he marched the next day in the order of battle; halted in the evening before the gates of Carthage, and allowed a night of repose, that he might not, in darkness and disorder, expose the city to the licence of the soldiers, or the soldiers themselves to the secret ambush of the city. But as the fears of Belisarius were the result of calm and intrepid reason, he

was soon satisfied that he might confide without danger in the peaceful and friendly aspect of the capital. Carthage blazed with innumerable torches, the signal of the public joy ; the chain was removed that guarded the entrance of the port, the gates were thrown open, and the people with acclamations of gratitude hailed and invited their Roman deliverers. The defeat of the Vandals and the freedom of Africa were announced to the city on the eve of St. Cyprian, when the churches were already adorned and illuminated for the festival of the martyr whom three centuries of superstition had almost raised to a local deity. . . One awful hour reversed the fortunes of the contending parties. The suppliant Vandals, who had so lately indulged the vices of conquerors, sought an humble refuge in the sanctuary of the church ; while the merchants of the east were delivered from the deepest dungeon of the palace by their affrighted keeper, who implored the protection of his captives, and showed them through an aperture in the wall the sails of the Roman fleet. After their separation from the army, the naval commanders had proceeded with slow caution along the coast, till they reached the Hermæan promontory, and obtained the first intelligence of the victory of Belisarius. Faithful to his instructions, they would have cast anchor about twenty miles from Carthage, if the more skilful had not represented the perils of the shore and the signs of an impending tempest. Still ignorant of the revolution, they declined however the rash attempt of forcing the chain of the port, and the adjacent harbour and suburb of Mandracium were insulted only by the rapine of a private officer, who disobeyed and deserted his leaders. But the imperial fleet, advancing with a fair wind, steered through the narrow entrance of the Goletta and occupied the deep and capacious lake of Tunis, a secure station about five miles from the capital. No sooner was Belisarius informed of the arrival than he despatched orders that the greatest part of the mariners should be immediately landed to join the triumph and to swell the apparent numbers of the Romans. Before he allowed them to enter the gates of Carthage he exhorted them, in a discourse worthy of himself and the occasion, not to disgrace the glory of their arms, and to remember that

the Vandals had been the tyrants, but that *they* were the deliverers of the Africans, who must now be respected as the voluntary and affectionate subjects of their common sovereign. The Romans marched through the street in close ranks, prepared for battle if an enemy had appeared; the strict order maintained by their general imprinted on their minds the duty of obedience; and in an age in which custom and impunity almost sanctified the abuse of conquest, the genius of one man repressed the passions of a victorious army. The voice of menace and complaint was silent, the trade of Carthage was not interrupted; while Africa changed her master and her government, the shops continued open and busy; and the soldiers, after sufficient guards had been posted, modestly departed to the houses which had been allotted for their reception. Belisarius fixed his residence in the palace, seated himself on the throne of Genseric, accepted and distributed the barbaric spoil, granted their lives to the suppliant Vandals, and laboured to restore the damage which the suburb of Mandracium had sustained in the preceding night. At supper he entertained his principal officers with the form and magnificence of a royal banquet. The victor was respectfully served by the captive officers of the household, and in the moments of festivity, when the impartial spectators applauded the fortune and merit of Belisarius, his envious flatterers secretly shed their venom on every word and gesture which might alarm the suspicions of a jealous monarch. One day was given to these pompous scenes, which may not be despised as useless if they attracted the popular veneration; but the active mind of Belisarius, which in the pride of victory could suppose defeat, had already resolved that the Roman empire in Africa should not depend on the chance of arms or the favour of the people. The fortifications of Carthage had alone been excepted from the general proscription; but in the reign of ninety-five years they were suffered to decay by the thoughtless and indolent Vandals. A wiser conqueror restored with incredible despatch the walls and ditches of the city. His liberality encouraged the workmen; the soldiers, the mariners, and the citizens vied with each other in the salutary labour; and Gelimer, who had feared to trust his person in an

open town, beheld with astonishment and despair the rising strength of an impregnable fortress.

But we have hardly finished admiring the brilliant picture of the conquest of Africa and Italy, before Gibbon gives us further proofs of his many-sided culture and catholicity of mind. His famous chapter on the Roman law has been accepted by the most fastidious experts of an esoteric science as a masterpiece of knowledge, condensation, and lucidity. It has actually been received as a textbook in some of the continental universities, published separately with notes and illustrations. When we consider the neglect of Roman jurisprudence in England till quite recent times, and its severe study on the Continent, we shall better appreciate the mental grasp and vigour which enabled an unprofessional Englishman in the last century to produce such a dissertation. A little further on (chapter forty-seven) the history of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the controversies that sprang up around it, are discussed with a subtlety worthy of a scientific theologian. It is perhaps the first attempt towards a philosophical history of dogma, less patient and minute than the works of the specialists of modern Germany on the same subject, but for spirit, clearness, and breadth it is superior to those profound but somewhat barbarous writers. The flexibility of intellect which can do justice in quick succession to such diverse subjects is very extraordinary, and assuredly implies great width of sympathy and large receptivity of nature.

Having terminated the period of Justinian, Gibbon makes a halt, and surveys the varied and immense scene through which he will presently pass in many directions. He rapidly discovers *ten* main lines, along which he will

advance in succession to his final goal, the conquest of Constantinople. The two pages at the commencement of the forty-eighth chapter, in which he sketches out the remainder of his plan and indicates the topics which he means to treat, are admirable as a luminous *précis*, and for the powerful grasp which they show of his immense subject. It lay spread out all before him, visible in every part to his penetrating eye, and he seems to rejoice in his conscious strength and ability to undertake the historical conquest on which he is about to set out. "Nor will this scope of narrative," he says, "the riches and variety of these materials, be incompatible with the unity of design and composition. As in his daily prayers the Mussulman of Fez or Delhi still turns his face towards the temple of Mecca, the historian's eye will always be fixed on the city of Constantinople." Then follows the catalogue of nations and empires whose fortunes he means to sing. A grander vision, a more majestic procession, never swept before the mind's eye of poet or historian.

And the practical execution is worthy of the initial inspiration. After a rapid and condensed narrative of Byzantine history till the end of the twelfth century, he takes up the brilliant theme of Mahomet and his successors. A few pages on the climate and physical features of Arabia fittingly introduce the subject. And it may be noted in passing that Gibbon's attention to geography, and his skill and taste for geographical description, are remarkable among his many gifts. He was as diligent a student of maps and travels as of historical records, and seems to have had a rare faculty of realising in imagination scenes and countries of which he had only read. In three chapters, glowing with oriental

colour and rapid as a charge of Arab horse, he tells the story of the prophet and the Saracen empire. Then the Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Russians appear on the scene, to be soon followed by the Normans, and their short but brilliant dominion in Southern Italy. But now the Seljukian Turks are emerging from the depths of Asia, taking the place of the degenerate Saracens invading the Eastern empire and conquering Jerusalem. The two waves of hostile fanaticism soon meet in the Crusades. The piratical seizure of Constantinople by the Latins brings in view the French and Venetians, the family of Courtenay and its pleasant digression. Then comes the slow agony of the restored Greek empire. Threatened by the Moguls, it is invaded and dismembered by the Ottoman Turks. Constantinople seems ready to fall into their hands. But the timely diversion of Tamerlane produces a respite of half a century. Nothing can be more artistic than Gibbon's management of his subject as he approaches its termination. He, who is such a master of swift narrative, at this point introduces artful pauses, *suspensions* of the final catastrophe, which heighten our interest in the fate which is hanging over the city of Constantine. In 1425 the victorious Turks have conquered all the Greek empire save the capital. Amurath II. besieged it for two months, and was only prevented from taking it by a domestic revolt in Asia Minor. At the end of his sixty-fifth chapter Gibbon leaves Constantinople hanging on the brink of destruction, and paints in glowing colours the military virtues of its deadly enemies, the Ottomans. Then he interposes one of his most finished chapters, of miscellaneous contents, but terminating in the grand and impressive pages on the revival of learning in Italy. There we read of the

"curiosity and emulation of the Latins," of the zeal of Petrarch and the success of Boccace in Greek studies, of Leontius, Pilatus, Bessarion, and Lascaris. A glow of sober enthusiasm warms the great scholar as he paints the early light of that happy dawn. He admits that the "arms of the Turks pressed the flight of the Muses" from Greece to Italy. But he "trembles at the thought that Greece might have been overwhelmed with her schools and libraries, before Europe had emerged from the deluge of barbarism, and that the seeds of science might have been scattered on the winds, before the Italian soil was prepared for their cultivation." In one of the most perfect sentences to be found in English prose he thus describes the Greek tongue: "In their lowest depths of servitude and depression, the subjects of the Byzantine throne were still possessed of a golden key that could unlock the treasures of antiquity, of a musical and prolific language that gives a soul to the objects of sense and a body to the abstractions of philosophy." Meanwhile we are made to feel that the subjects of the Byzantine throne, with their musical speech, that Constantinople with her libraries and schools, will all soon fall a prey to the ravening and barbarous Turk. This brightening light of the Western sky contending with the baleful gloom which is settling down over the East, is one of the most happy contrasts in historical literature. Then comes the end, the preparations and skill of the savage invader, the futile but heroic defence, the overwhelming ruin which struck down the Cross and erected the Crescent over the city of Constantine the Great.

It is one of the many proofs of Gibbon's artistic instinct that he did not end with this great catastrophe.

On the contrary, he adds three more chapters. His fine tact warned him that the tumult and thunder of the final ruin must not be the last sounds to strike the ear. A resolution of the discord was needed; a soft chorale should follow the din and lead to a mellow *adagio* close. And this he does with supreme skill. With ill-suppressed disgust, he turns from New to Old Rome. "Constantinople no longer appertains to the Roman historian—nor shall I enumerate the civil and religious edifices that were profaned or erected by its Turkish masters." Amid the decayed temples and mutilated beauty of the Eternal City, he moves down to a melodious and pathetic conclusion—piously visits the remaining fragments of ancient splendour and art, deplores and describes the ravages wrought by time, and still more by man, and recurring once again to the scene of his first inspiration, bids farewell to the Roman empire among the ruins of the Capitol.

We have hitherto spoken in terms of warm, though perhaps not excessive eulogy of this great work. But praise would lack the force of moderation and equipoise, if allusion were not made to some of its defects. The pervading defect of it all has been already referred to in a preceding chapter—an inadequate conception of society as an organism, living and growing, like other organisms, according to special laws of its own. In these brilliant volumes on the Middle Ages, the special problems which that period suggests are not stated, far less solved: they are not even suspected. The feudal polity, the Catholic Church, the theocratic supremacy of the Popes, considered as institutions which the historian is called upon to estimate and judge; the gradual dissolution of both feudalism and Catholicism, brought

about by the spread of industry in the temporal order and of science in the spiritual order, are not even referred to. Many more topics might be added to this list of weighty omissions. It would be needless to say that no blame attaches to Gibbon for neglecting views of history which had not emerged in his time, if there were not persons who, forgetting the slow progress of knowledge, are apt to ascribe the defects of a book to incompetence in its author. If Gibbon's conception of the Middle Ages seems to us inadequate now, it is because since his time our conceptions of society in that and in all periods have been much enlarged. We may be quite certain that if Gibbon had had our experience, no one would have seen the imperfections of particular sides of his work as we now have it more clearly than he.

Laying aside, therefore, reflexions of this kind as irrelevant and unjust, we may ask whether there are any other faults which may fairly be found with him. One must admit that there are. After all, they are not very important.

(1.) Striking as is his account of Justinian's reign, it has two blemishes. First, the offensive details about the vices of Theodora. Granting them to be well authenticated, which they are not, it was quite unworthy of the author and his subject to soil his pages with such a *chronique scandaleuse*. The defence which he sets up in his Memoirs, that he is "justified in painting the manners of the times, and that the vices of Theodora form an essential feature in the reign and character of Justinian," cannot be admitted. First, we are not sure that the vices existed, and were not the impure inventions of a malignant calumniator. Secondly, Gibbon

is far from painting the manners of the time as a moralist or an historian; he paints them with a zest for pruriency worthy of Bayle or Brantome. It was an occasion for a wise scepticism to register grave doubts as to the infamous stories of Procopius. A rehabilitation of Theodora is not a theme calculated to provoke enthusiasm, and is impossible besides from the entire want of adequate evidence. But a thoughtful writer would not have lost his time, if he referred to the subject at all, in pointing out the moral improbability of the current accounts. He might have dwelt on the *unsupported* testimony of the only witness, the unscrupulous Procopius, whom Gibbon himself convicts on another subject of flagrant mendacity. But he would have been especially slow to believe that a woman who had led the life of incredible profligacy he has described, would, in consequence of "some vision either of sleep or fancy," in which future exaltation was promised to her, assume "like a skilful actress, a more decent character, relieve her poverty by the laudable industry of spinning wool, and affect a life of chastity and solitude in a small house, which she afterwards changed into a magnificent temple." Magdalens have been converted, no doubt, from immoral living, but not by considerations of astute prudence suggested by day-dreams of imperial greatness. Gibbon might have thought of the case of Madame de Maintenon, and how her reputation fared in the hands of the vindictive courtiers of Versailles; how a woman, cold as ice and pure as snow, was freely charged with the most abhorrent vices without an atom of foundation. But the truth probably is that he never thought of the subject seriously

at all, and that, yielding to a regrettable inclination, he copied his licentious Greek notes with little reluctance.

(2.) The character of Belisarius, enigmatical enough in itself, is made by him more enigmatical still. He concludes the forty first chapter, in which the great deeds of the conqueror of Italy and Africa, and the ingratitude with which Justinian rewarded his services, are set forth in strong contrast, with the inept remark that "Belisarius appears to be either below or above the character of a MAN." The grounds of the apparent meekness with which Belisarius supported his repeated disgraces cannot now be ascertained: but the motives of Justinian's conduct are not so difficult to find. As Finlay points out in his thoughtful history of Greece, Belisarius must have been a peculator on a large and dangerous scale. "Though he refused the Gothic throne and the empire of the West, he did not despise nor neglect wealth: he accumulated riches which could not have been acquired by any commander-in-chief amidst the wars and famines of the period, without rendering the military and civil administration subservient to his pecuniary profit. On his return from Italy he lived at Constantinople in almost regal splendour, and maintained a body of 7,000 cavalry attached to his household. In an empire where confiscation was an ordinary financial resource, and under a sovereign whose situation rendered jealousy only common prudence, it is not surprising that the wealth of Belisarius excited the imperial cupidity, and induced Justinian to seize great part of it" (*Greece under the Romans*, chap. 3). There is shrewd insight in this, and though we may regret that we cannot attain to more, it is better than leaving the subject with an unmeaning paradox.

It may be said generally that Gibbon has not done justice to the services rendered to Europe by the Byzantine empire. In his crowded forty-eighth chapter, which is devoted to the subject, he passes over events and characters with such speed that his history in this part becomes little more than a chronicle, vivid indeed, but barren of thoughtful political views. His account of the Isaurian period may be instanced among others as an example of defective treatment. If we turn to the judicious Finlay, we see what an immense but generally unacknowledged debt Europe owes to the Greek empire. The saving of Christendom from Mohammedan conquest is too easily attributed to the genius of Charles Martel and his brave Franks. The victory at Tours was important no doubt, but almost a century previously the followers of the prophet had been checked by Heraclius; and their memorable repulse before Constantinople under the Isaurian Leo was the real barrier opposed to their conquest of the West. It requires but little reflection to see that without this brave resistance to the Moslem invasion, the course of mediæval history would have been completely changed. Next in time, but hardly second in value to the services of the Greeks at Marathon and Salamis, must be reckoned the services of the Byzantine emperors in repelling the barbarians. Such an important consideration as this should hardly have escaped Gibbon.

Gibbon's account of Charlemagne is strangely inadequate. It is perhaps the only instance in his work where he has failed to appreciate a truly great man, and the failure is the more deplorable as it concerns one of the greatest men who have ever lived. He did not realise the greatness of the man, of his age, or of his

work. Properly considered, the eighth century is the most important and memorable which Europe has ever seen. During its course the geographical limits, the ecclesiastical polity, and the feudal system within and under which our western group of nations was destined to live for five or six centuries, were provisionally settled and determined. The wonderful house of the Carolings, which produced no less than five successive rulers of genius (of whom two had extraordinary genius, Charles Martel and Charlemagne, were the human instruments of this great work. The Frankish Monarchy was hastening to ruin when they saved it. Saxons in the East and Saracens in the South were on the point of extinguishing the few surviving embers of civilisation which still existed. The Bishop of Rome was ready to fall a prey to the Lombards, and the progressive papacy of Hildebrand and Innocent ran imminent risk of being extirpated at its root. Charles and his ancestors prevented these evils. Of course it is open to any one to say that there were no evils threatening, that Mohammedanism is as good as Christianity, that the Papacy was a monstrous calamity, that to have allowed Eastern Germany to remain pagan and barbarous would have done no harm. The question cannot be discussed here. But every law of historic equity compels us to admit that whether the result was good or bad, the genius of men who could leave such lasting impressions on the world as the Carolings did, must have been exceptionally great. And this is what Gibbon has not seen; he has not seen that, whether their work was good or bad in the issue, it was colossal. His tone in reference to Charlemagne is unworthy to a degree. "Without injustice to his fame, I may discern

some blemishes in the sanctity and greatness of the restorer of the Western Empire. Of his moral virtues, chastity was not the most conspicuous." This from the pen of Gibbon seems hardly serious. Again: "I touch with reverence the laws of Charlemagne, so highly applauded by a respectable judge. They compose not a system, but a series of occasional and minute edicts, for the correction of abuses, the reformation of manners, the economy of his farms, the care of his poultry, and even the sale of his eggs." And yet Gibbon had read the Capitularies. The struggle and care of the hero to master in some degree the wide welter of barbarism surging around him, he never recognised. It is a spot on Gibbon's fame.

Dean Milman considers that Gibbon's account of the Crusades is the least accurate and satisfactory chapter in his history, and "that he has here failed in that lucid arrangement which in general gives perspicuity to his most condensed and crowded narratives." This blame seems to be fully merited, if restricted to the second of the two chapters which Gibbon has devoted to the Crusades. The fifty-eighth chapter, in which he treats of the First Crusade, leaves nothing to be desired. It is not one of his best chapters, though it is quite up to his usually high level. But the fifty ninth chapter, it must be owned, is not only weak, but what is unexampled elsewhere in him, confused and badly written. It is not, as in the case of Charlemagne, a question of imperfect appreciation of a great man or epoch; it is a matter of careless and slovenly presentation of a period which he had evidently mastered with his habitual thoroughness, but, owing to the rapidity with which he composed his last volume, he did not do

full justice to it. He says significantly in his Memoirs, that "he wished that a pause, an interval, had been allowed for a serious revisal" of the last three volumes, and there can be little doubt that this chapter was one of the sources of his regrets. It is in fact a mere tangle. The Second and the Third Crusades are so jumbled together, that it is only a reader who knows the subject very well who can find his way through the labyrinth. Gibbon seems at this point, a thing very unusual with him, to have become impatient with his subject, and to have wished to hurry over it. "A brief parallel," he says, "may save the repetition of a tedious narrative." The result of this expeditious method has been far from happy. It is the only occasion where Gibbon has failed in his usual high finish and admirable literary form.

Gibbon's style was at one period somewhat of a party question. Good Christians felt a scruple in discerning any merits in the style of a writer who had treated the martyrs of the early Church with so little ceremony and generosity. On the other hand, those whose opinions approached more or less to his, expatiated on the splendour and majesty of his diction. Archbishop Whately went out of his way in a note to his *Logic* to make a keen thrust at an author whom it was well to depreciate whenever occasion served. "His way of writing," he says, "reminds one of those persons who never dare look you full in the face." Such criticisms are out of date now. The faults of Gibbon's style are obvious enough, and its compensatory merits are not far to seek. No one can overlook its frequent tumidity and constant want of terseness. It lacks suppleness, ease, variety. It is not often distinguished by happy

selection of epithet, and seems to ignore all delicacy of *nuance*. A prevailing grandiloquence, which easily slides into pomposity, is its greatest blemish. The acute Porson saw this and expressed it admirably. In the preface to his letters to Archdeacon Travis, he says of Gibbon, "Though his style is in general correct and elegant, he sometimes 'draws out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.' In endeavouring to avoid vulgar terms he too frequently dignifies trifles, and clothes common thoughts in a splendid dress that would be rich enough for the noblest ideas. In short we are too often reminded of that great man, Mr. Prig, the auctioneer, whose manner was so inimitably fine that he had as much to say on a ribbon as on a Raphael." It seems as if Gibbon had taken the stilted tone of the old French tragedy for his model, rather than the crisp and nervous prose of the best French writers. We are constantly offended by a superfine diction lavished on barbarous chiefs and rough soldiers of the Lower Empire, which almost reproduces the high flown rhetoric in which Corneille's and Racine's characters address each other. Such phrases as the "majesty of the throne," "the dignity of the purple," the "wisdom of the senate," recur with a rather jarring monotony, especially when the rest of the narrative is designed to show that there was no majesty nor dignity nor wisdom involved in the matter. We feel that the writer was thinking more of his sonorous sentence than of the real fact. On the other hand, nothing but a want of candour or taste can lead any one to overlook the rare and great excellences of Gibbon's style. First of all, it is singularly correct: a rather common merit now, but not common in his day. But its sustained vigour

and loftiness will always be uncommon; above all its rapidity and masculine length of stride are quite admirable. When he takes up his pen to describe a campaign, or any great historic scene, we feel that we shall have something worthy of the occasion, that we shall be carried swiftly and grandly through it all, without the suspicion of a breakdown of any kind being possible. An indefinable stamp of weightiness is impressed on Gibbon's writing; he has a baritone manliness which banishes everthing small, trivial, or weak. When he is eloquent (and it should be remembered to his credit that he never affects eloquence, though he occasionally affects dignity), he rises without effort into real grandeur. On the whole we may say that his manner, with certain manifest faults, is not unworthy of his matter, and the praise is great.

It is not quite easy to give expression to another feeling which is often excited in reading Gibbon. It is somewhat of this kind, that it is more fitted to inspire admiration than love or sympathy. Its merits are so great, the mass of information it contains is so stupendous, that all competent judges of such work feel bound to praise it. Whether they like it in the same degree, may be questioned. Among reading men and educated persons it is not common—such is my experience—to meet with people who know their Gibbon well. Superior women do not seem to take to him kindly, even when there is no impediment on religious grounds. Madame du Deffand, writing to Walpole, says, "I whisper it to you, but I am not pleased with Mr. Gibbon's work. It is declamatory, oratorical . . . I lay it aside without regret, and it requires an effort to take it up again." Another of Walpole's correspondents, the

Countess of Ossory, seems to have made similar strictures. If we admit that women are less capable than masculine scholars of doing justice to the strong side of Gibbon, we may also acknowledge that they are better fitted than men to appreciate and to be shocked by his defective side, which is a prevailing want of moral elevation and nobility of sentiment. His cheek rarely flushes in enthusiasm for a good cause. The tragedy of human life never seems to touch him, no glimpse of the infinite ever calms and raises the reader of his pages. Like nearly all the men of his day, he was of the earth earthy, and it is impossible to get over the fact.

CHAPTER X.

LAST ILLNESS.—DEATH.—CONCLUSION.

Gibbon had now only about six months to live. He did not seem to have suffered by his rapid journey from Lausanne to London. During the summer which he spent with his friend Lord Sheffield, he was much as usual; only his friend noticed that his habitual dislike to motion appeared to increase, and he was so incapable of exercise that he was confined to the library and dining-room. "Then he joined Mr. F. North in pleasant arguments against exercise in general. He ridiculed the unsettled and restless disposition that summer, the most uncomfortable of all seasons, as he said, generally gives to those who have the use of their limbs." The true disciples of Epicurus are not always the least stout and stoical in the presence of irreparable evils.

After spending three or four months at Sheffield Place, he went to Bath to visit his stepmother, Mrs. Gibbon. His conduct to her through life was highly honourable to him. It should be remembered that her jointure, paid out of his father's decayed estate, was a great tax on his small income. In his efforts to improve his position by selling his landed property, Mrs. Gibbon seems to have been at times somewhat difficult to satisfy as regards the security of her interests. It was only

prudent on her part. But it is easy to see what a source of alienation and quarrel was here ready prepared, if both parties had not risen superior to sordid motives. There never seems to have been the smallest cloud between them. When one of his properties was sold he writes: "Mrs. Gibbon's jointure is secured on the Buriton estate, and her legal consent is requisite for the sale. Again and again I must repeat my hope that she is perfectly satisfied, and that the close of her life may not be embittered by suspicion, fear, or discontent. What new security does she prefer—the funds, a mortgage, or your land? At all events, she must be made easy." So Gibbon left town and lay at Reading on his road to Bath: here he passed about ten days with his stepmother, who was now nearly eighty years of age. "In mind and conversation she is just the same as twenty years ago," he writes to Lord Sheffield; "she has spirits, appetite, legs, and eyes, and talks of living till ninety. I can say from my heart, Amen." And in another letter, a few days later, he says: "A *tête à tête* of eight or nine hours every day is rather difficult to support; yet I do assure you that our conversation flows with more ease and spirit when we are alone, than when any auxiliaries are summoned to our aid. She is indeed a wonderful woman, and I think all her faculties of the mind stronger and more active than I have ever known them. . . . . I shall therefore depart next Friday, but I may possibly reckon without my host, as I have not yet apprised Mrs. G. of the term of my visit, and will certainly not quarrel with her for a short delay." He then went to Althorpe, and it is the last evidence of his touching a book—"exhausted the morning (of the 7th November) among the first editions of Cicero." Then he came to London, and in a few days was seized with the

illness which in a little more than two months put an end to his life.

His malady was dropsy, complicated with other disorders. He had most strangely neglected a very dangerous symptom for upwards of thirty years, not only having failed to take medical advice about it, but even avoiding all allusion to it to bosom friends like Lord Sheffield. But longer concealment was now impossible. He sent for the eminent surgeon Farquhar (the same who afterwards attended William Pitt), and he, together with Cline, at once recognised the case as one of the utmost gravity, though they did not say as much to the patient. On Thursday, the 14th of November, he was tapped and greatly relieved He said he was not appalled by the operation, and during its progress he did not lay aside his usual good-humoured pleasantry. He was soon out again, but only for a few days, and a fortnight after another tapping was necessary. Again he went out to dinners and parties, which must have been most imprudent at his age and in his state. But he does not seem to have acted contrary to medical advice. He was very anxious to meet the prime minister, William Pitt, with whom he was not acquainted, though he must have seen him in old days in the House. He saw him twice; once at Eden Farm for a whole day, and was much gratified, we are told. At last he got to what he called his home—the house of his true and devoted friend, Lord Sheffield. "But," says the latter, whose narrative of his friend's last illness is marked by a deep and reserved tenderness that does him much honour, "this last visit to Sheffield Place became far different from any he had ever made before. That ready, cheerful, various and illuminating conversation which we had before admired

in him, was not always to be found in the library or the drawing-room. He moved with difficulty, and retired from company sooner than he had been used to do. On the 23rd of December his appetite began to fail him. He observed to me that it was a very bad sign *with him* when he could not eat his breakfast, which he had done at all times very heartily; and this seems to have been the strongest expression of apprehension that he was ever observed to utter." He soon became too ill to remain beyond the reach of the highest medical advice. On the 7th of January, 1794, he left a houseful of company and friends for his lodgings in St. James's Street. On arriving he sent the following note to Lord Sheffield, the last lines he ever wrote :—

"ST. JAMES'S, FOUR O'CLOCK, TUESDAY.

"This date says everything. I was almost killed between Sheffield Place and East Grinstead by hard, frozen, long, and cross ruts, that would disgrace the approach of an Indian wigwam. The rest was somewhat less painful, and I reached this place half dead, but not seriously feverish or ill. I found a dinner invitation from Lord Lucan: but what are dinners to me? I wish they did not know of my departure. I catch the flying post. What an effort! Adieu till Thursday or Friday."

The end was not far off. On the 13th of January he underwent another operation, and, as usual, experienced much relief. "His spirits continued good. He talked of passing his time at houses which he had often frequented with great pleasure—the Duke of Devonshire's, Mr. Craufurd's, Lord Spencer's, Lord Lucan's, Sir Ralph Payne's, Mr. Batt's." On the 14th of January "he saw some company—Lady Lucan and Lady Spencer—

and thought himself well enough to omit the opium draught which he had been used to take for some time. He slept very indifferently; before nine the next morning he rose, but could not eat his breakfast. However, he appeared tolerably well, yet complained at times of a pain in his stomach. At one o'clock he received a visit of an hour from Madame de Sylva; and at three, his friend, Mr. Craufurd, of Auchinames (whom he always mentioned with particular regard), called, and stayed with him till past five o'clock. They talked, as usual, on various subjects; and twenty hours before his death Mr. Gibbon happened to fall into a conversation not uncommon with him, on the probable duration of his life. He said that he thought himself a good life for ten, twelve, or perhaps twenty years. About six he ate the wing of a chicken and drank three glasses of Madeira. After dinner he became very uneasy and impatient, complained a good deal, and appeared so weak that his servant was alarmed.

"During the evening he complained much of his stomach, and of a feeling of nausea. Soon after nine, he took his opium draught and went to bed. About ten he complained of much pain, and desired that warm napkins might be applied to his stomach. He almost incessantly expressed a sense of pain till about four o'clock in the morning, when he said he found his stomach much easier. About seven the servant asked whether he should send for Mr. Farquhar. He answered, No; that he was as well as the day before. At about half-past eight he got out of bed, and said he was 'plus adroit' than he had been for three months past, and got into bed again without assistance, better than usual. About nine he said he would rise. The servant, however, persuaded him to remain in bed till Mr. Farquhar, who was

expected at eleven, should come. Till about that hour he spoke with great facility. Mr. Farquhar came at the time appointed, and he was then visibly dying. When the *valet-de-chambre* returned, after attending Mr. Farquhar out of the room, Mr. Gibbon said, 'Pourquoi est ce que vous me quittez?' This was about half-past eleven. At twelve he drank some brandy and water from a teapot, and desired his favourite servant to stay with him. These were the last words he pronounced articulately. To the last he preserved his senses: and when he could no longer speak, his servant having asked a question, he made a sign to show that he understood him. He was quite tranquil, and did not stir, his eyes half shut. About a quarter before one he ceased to breathe." He wanted just eighty-three days of fifty-seven years of age.

Thus, in consequence of his own strange self-neglect and imprudence, was extinguished one of the most richly-stored minds that ever lived. Occurring when it did, so near the last summons, Gibbon's prospective hope of continued life "for ten, twelve, or twenty years" is harshly pathetic, and full of that irony which mocks the vain cares of men. But, truly, his forecast was not irrational if he had not neglected ordinary precautions. In spite of his ailments he felt full, and was full, of life, when he was cut off. We cannot be sure if lengthened days would have added much to his work already achieved. There is hardly a parallel case in literature of the great powers of a whole life being so concentrated on one supreme and magnificent effort. Yet, if he had lived to 1804, or as an extreme limit, to 1814, we should have been all gainers. In the first place, he certainly would have finished his admirable autobiography. We cannot imagine what he would have made of it, judging

from the fragment which exists. And yet that fragment is almost a masterpiece. But his fertile mind had other schemes in prospect; and what such a diligent worker would have done with a decade or two more of years it is impossible to say, except that it is certain they would not have been wasted. The extinction of a real mind is ever an irreparable loss.

As it was, he went to his rest after one of the greatest victories ever achieved in his own field of humane letters, and lived long enough to taste the fruits of his toil. He was never puffed up, but soberly and without arrogance received his laurels. His unselfish zeal and haste to console his bereaved friend showed him warm and loving to the last; and we may say that his last serious effort was consecrated to the genius of pious friendship.

In 1796, two years after Gibbon's death, Lord Sheffield published two quarto volumes of the historian's miscellaneous works. They have been republished in one thick octavo, and many persons suppose that it contains the whole of the posthumous works; not unnaturally, as a fraudulent statement on the title-page, "complete in one volume," is well calculated to produce that impression. But in 1814 Lord Sheffield issued a second edition in five volumes octavo, containing much additional matter, which additional matter was again published in a quarto form, no doubt for the convenience of the purchasers of the original quarto edition.

Of the posthumous works, the Memoirs are by far the most important portion. Unfortunately, they were left in a most unfinished state, and what we now read is nothing else than a mosaic put together by Lord Sheffield from *six* different sketches. Next to the Memoirs are the journals and diaries of his studies. As a picture of Gibbon's method, zeal, and thoroughness in the

pursuit of knowledge, they are of the highest interest. But they refer to an early period of his studies, long previous to the concentration of his mind on his great work, and one would like to know whether they present the best selection that might have been made from these records. It is interesting to follow Gibbon in his perusal of Homer and Juvenal at five and twenty. But one would much like to be admitted to his study when he was a far riper scholar, and preparing for or writing the *Decline and Fall*. Lord Sheffield positively prohibited, by a clause in his will, any further publication of the Gibbon papers, and although Dean Milman was permitted to see them, it was with the express understanding that none of their contents should be divulged. After the Memoirs and the journals, the most interesting portion of the miscellaneous works are *The Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, which in their present form are merely the preparatory sketch of a large work. It is too imperfect to allow us to judge of what Gibbon even designed to make of it. But it contains some masterly pages, and the style in many places seems more nervous and supple than that of the *Decline and Fall*.

For instance, this account of Albert Azo the Second :—

"Like one of his Tuscan ancestors Azo the Second was distinguished among the princes of Italy by the epithet of the *Rich*. The particulars of his rentroll cannot now be ascertained. An occasional though authentic deed of investiture enumerates eighty-three fiefs or manors which he held of the empire in Lombardy and Tuscany, from the Marquisate of Este to the county of Luni ; but to these possessions must be added the lands which he enjoyed as the vassal of the Church, the ancient patrimony of Otbert (the terra Obertenga) in the counties of Arezzo, Pisa, and Lucca, and the marriage portion of his first wife, which, according to the various readings of the manuscripts, may be computed either at twenty or two hundred thousand

English acres. If such a mass of landed property were now accumulated on the head of an Italian nobleman, the annual revenue might satisfy the largest demands of private luxury or avarice, and the fortunate owner would be rich in the improvement of agriculture, the manufactures of industry, the refinement of taste, and the extent of commerce. But the barbarism of the eleventh century diminished the income and aggravated the expense of the Marquis of Este. In a long series of war and anarchy, man and the works of man had been swept away, and the introduction of each ferocious and idle stranger had been overbalanced by the loss of five or six perhaps of the peaceful industrious natives. The mischievous growth of vegetation, the frequent inundations of the rivers were no longer checked by the vigilance of labour; the face of the country was again covered with forests and morasses; of the vast domains which acknowledged Azo for their lord, the far greater part was abandoned to the beasts of the field, and a much smaller portion was reduced to the state of constant and productive husbandry. An adequate rent may be obtained from the skill and substance of a free tenant who fertilizes a grateful soil, and enjoys the security and benefit of a long lease. But faint is the hope and scanty is the produce of those harvests which are raised by the reluctant toil of peasants and slaves condemned to a bare subsistance and careless of the interests of a rapacious master. If his granaries are full, his purse is empty, and the want of cities or commerce, the difficulty of finding or reaching a market, obliges him to consume on the spot a part of his useless stock, which cannot be exchanged for merchandise or money. . . . The entertainment of his vassals and soldiers, their pay and rewards, their arms and horses, surpassed the measure of the most oppressive tribute, and the destruction which he inflicted on his neighbours was often retaliated on his own lands. The costly elegance of palaces and gardens was superseded by the laborious and expensive construction of strong castles on the summits of the most inaccessible rocks, and some of these, like the fortress of Canossa in the Apennine, were built and provided to sustain a three years' siege against a royal army. But his defence in this world was less burdensome to a wealthy lord than his salvation in the next; the demands of his chapel, his priests, his

alms, his offerings, his pilgrimages were incessantly renewed; the monastery chosen for his sepulchre was endowed with his fairest possessions, and the naked heir might often complain that his father's sins had been redeemed at too high a price. The Marquis Azo was not exempt from the contagion of the times; his devotion was animated and inflamed by the frequent miracles that were performed in his presence; and the monks of Vangadizza, who yielded to his request the arm of a dead saint, were not ignorant of the value of that inestimable jewel. After satisfying the demands of war and superstition he might appropriate the rest of his revenue to use and pleasure. But the Italians of the eleventh century were imperfectly skilled in the liberal and mechanical arts; the objects of foreign luxury were furnished at an exorbitant price by the merchants of Pisa and Venice; and the superfluous wealth which could not purchase the real comforts of life, were idly wasted on some rare occasions of vanity and pomp. Such were the nuptials of Boniface, Duke or Marquis of Tuscany, whose family was long after united with that of Azo by the marriage of their children. These nuptials were celebrated on the banks of the Mincius, which the fancy of Virgil has decorated with a more beautiful picture. The princes and people of Italy were invited to the feasts, which continued three months; the fertile meadows, which are intersected by the slow and winding course of the river, were covered with innumerable tents, and the bridegroom displayed and diversified the scenes of his proud and tasteless magnificence. All the utensils of the service were of silver, and his horses were shod with plates of the same metal, loosely nailed and carelessly dropped, to indicate his contempt of riches. An image of plenty and profusion was expressed in the banquet; the most delicious wines were drawn in buckets from the well; and the spices of the East were ground in water-mills like common flour. The dramatic and musical arts were in the rudest state; but the Marquis had summoned the most popular singers, harpers, and buffoons to exercise their talents in this splendid theatre. After this festival I might remark a singular gift of this same Boniface to the Emperor Henry III., a chariot and oxen of solid silver, which were designed only as a vehicle for a hogshead of vinegar. If such an example should seem

above the imitation of Azo himself, the Marquis of Este was at least superior in wealth and dignity to the vassals of his compeer. One of these vassals, the Viscount of Mantua, presented the German monarch with one hundred falcons and one hundred bay horses, a grateful contribution to the pleasures of a royal sportsman. In that age the proud distinction between the nobles and princes of Italy was guarded with jealous ceremony. The Viscount of Mantua had never been seated at the table of his immediate lord; he yielded to the invitation of the Emperor; and a stag's skin filled with pieces of gold was graciously accepted by the Marquis of Tuscany as the fine of his presumption.

"The temporal felicity of Azo was crowned by the long possession of honour and riches; he died in the year 1097, aged upwards of an hundred years; and the term of his mortal existence was almost commensurate with the lapse of the eleventh century. The character as well as the situation of the Marquis of Este rendered him an actor in the revolutions of that memorable period; but time has cast a veil over the virtues and vices of the man, and I must be content to mark some of the eras, the milestones of his which measure the extent and intervals of the vacant way. Albert Azo the Second was no more than seventeen when he first drew the sword of rebellion and patriotism, when he was involved with his grandfather, his father, and his three uncles in a common proscription. In the vigour of his manhood, about his fiftieth year, the Ligurian Marquis governed the cities of Milan and Genoa as the minister of Imperial authority. He was upwards of seventy when he passed the Alps to vindicate the inheritance of Maine for the children of his second marriage. He became the friend and servant of Gregory VII., and in one of his epistles that ambitious pontiff recommends the Marquis Azo, as the most faithful and best beloved of the Italian princes, as the proper channel through which a king of Hungary might convey his petitions to the apostolic throne. In the mighty contest between the crown and the mitre, the Marquis Azo and the Countess Matilda led the powers of Italy. And when the standard of St. Peter was displayed, neither the age of the one nor the sex of the other could detain them from the field. With these two affectionate clients the Pope maintained his station in the fortress of Canossa, while

the Emperor, barefoot on the frozen ground, fasted and prayed three days at the foot of the rock; they were witnesses to the abject ceremony of the penance and pardon of Henry IV.; and in the triumph of the Church a patriot might foresee the deliverance of Italy from the German yoke. At the time of this event the Marquis of Este was above fourscore; but in the twenty following years he was still alive and active amidst the revolutions of peace and war. The last act which he subscribed is dated above a century after his birth; and in that the venerable chief possesses the command of his faculties, his family, and his fortune. In this rare prerogative the longevity of Albert Azo the Second stands alone. Nor can I remember in the *authentic* annals of mortality a single example of a king or prince, of a statesman or general, of a philosopher or poet, whose life has been extended beyond the period of a hundred years. . . . Three approximations which will not hastily be matched have distinguished the present century, Aurungzebe, Cardinal Fleury, and Fontenelle. Had a fortnight more been given to the philosopher, he might have celebrated his secular festival; but the lives and labours of the Mogul king and the French minister were terminated before they had accomplished their ninetieth year."

Then follow several striking and graceful pages on Lucrezia Borgia and Renée of France, Duchess of Ferrara. The following description of the University of Padua and the literary tastes of the house of Este is all that we can give here :—

"An university had been founded at Padua by the house of Este, and the scholastic rust was polished away by the revival of the literature of Greece and Rome. The studies of Ferrara were directed by skilful and eloquent professors, either natives or foreigners. The ducal library was filled with a valuable collection of manuscripts and printed books, and as soon as twelve new plays of Plautus had been found in Germany, the Marquis Lionel of Este was impatient to obtain a fair and faithful copy of that ancient poet. Nor were these elegant pleasures confined to the learned world. Under the reign of

Hercules I. a wooden theatre at a moderate cost of a thousand crowns was constructed in the largest court of the palace, the scenery represented some houses, a seaport and a ship, and the *Menechmi* of Plautus, which had been translated into Italian by the Duke himself, was acted before a numerous and polite audience. In the same language and with the same success the *Amphytrion* of Plautus and the *Eunuchus* of Terence were successively exhibited. And these classic models, which formed the taste of the spectators, excited the emulation of the poets of the age. For the use of the court and theatre of Ferrara, Ariosto composed his comedies, which were often played with applause, which are still read with pleasure. And such was the enthusiasm of the new arts that one of the sons of Alphonso the First did not disdain to speak a prologue on the stage. In the legitimate forms of dramatic composition the Italians have not excelled ; but it was in the court of Ferrara that they invented and refined the *pastoral comedy*, a romantic Arcadia which violates the truth of manners and the simplicity of nature, but which commands our indulgence by the elaborate luxury of eloquence and wit. The *Aminta* of Tasso was written for the amusement and acted in the presence of Alphonso the Second, and his sister Leonora might apply to herself the language of a passion which disordered the reason without clouding the genius of her poetical lover. Of the numerous imitations, the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, which alone can vie with the fame and merit of the original, is the work of the Duke's secretary of state. It was exhibited in a private house in Ferrara. . . . . The father of the Tuscan muses, the sublime but unequal Dante, had pronounced that Ferrara was never honoured with the name of a poet ; he would have been astonished to behold the chorus of bards, of melodious swans (their own allusion), which now peopled the banks of the Po. In the court of Duke Borso and his successor, Boyardo Count Scandiano, was respected as a noble, a soldier, and a scholar : his vigorous fancy first celebrated the loves and exploits of the paladin Orlando ; and his fame has been preserved and eclipsed by the brighter glories and continuation of his work. Ferrara may boast that on classic ground Ariosto and Tasso lived and sung ; that the lines of the *Orlando Furioso*, the

Gierusalemme Liberata were inscribed in everlasting characters under the eye of the First and Second Alphonso. In a period of near three thousand years, five great epic poets have arisen in the world, and it is a singular prerogative that two of the five should be claimed as their own by a short age and a petty state."

It perhaps will be admitted that if the style of these passages is less elaborate than that of the *Decline and Fall*, the deficiency, if it is one, is compensated by greater ease and lightness of touch.

It may be interesting to give a specimen of Gibbon's French style. His command of that language was not inferior to his command of his native idiom. One might even be inclined to say that his French prose is controlled by a purer taste than his English prose. The following excerpt, describing the Battle of Morgarten, will enable the reader to judge. It is taken from his early unfinished work on the History of the Swiss Republic, to which reference has already been made (p. 59) :—

" Léopold était parti de Zug vers le milieu de la nuit. Il se flattait d'occuper sans résistance le défile de Morgarten qui ne perçait qu'avec difficulte entre le lac Aegré et le pied d'une montagne escarpée. Il marchait à la tête de sa gendarmerie. Une colonne profond d'infanterie le suivait de près, et les uns et les autres se promettaient une victoire facile si les paysans osaient se présenter à leur rencontre. Ils étaient à peine entrés dans un chemin rude et étroit, et qui ne permettait qu'à trois ou quatre de marcher de front, qu'ils se sentirent accablés d'une grêle de pierres et de traits. Rodolphe de Reding, landamman de Schwitz et général des Confédérés, n'avait oublié aucun des avantages que lui offrit la situation des lieux. Il avait fait couper des rochers énormes, qui en s'ébranlant dès qu'on retirait les faibles appuis qui les retenaient encore, se détachaient du sommet de la montagne et se précipitaient avec un bruit

affreux sur les bataillons serrés des Autrichiens. Déjà les chevaux s'effrayaient, les rangs se confondaient, et le désordre égarait le courage et le rendait inutile, lorsque les Suisses descendirent de la montagne en poussant de grands cris. Accoutumés à poursuivre le chamois sur les bords glissants des précipices, ils couraient d'un pas assuré au milieu des neiges. Ils étaient armés de grosses et pesantes hallebardes, auxquelles le fer le mieux trempé ne résistait point. Les soldats de Léopold chancelants et découragés cédèrent bientôt aux efforts désespérés d'une troupe qui combattait pour tout ce qu'il y a de plus cher aux hommes. L'Abbé d'Einsidlen, premier auteur de cette guerre malheureuse, et le comte Henri de Montfort, donnèrent les premiers l'example de la fuite. Le désordre devint général, le carnage fut affreux, et les Suisses se livraient au plaisir de la vengeance. A neuf heures du matin la bataille était gagnée. . . . . Un grand nombre d'Autrichiens se précipitant les uns sur les autres, cherchèrent vainement dans le lac un asyle contre la fureur de leurs ennemis. Ils y périrent presque tous. Quinze cents hommes restèrent sur le champ de bataille. Ils étaient pour la plupart de la gendarmerie, qu'une valeur malheureuse et une armure pesante arrêtaient dans un lieu où l'un et l'autre leur étaient inutiles. Longtemps après l'on s'apercevait dans toutes les provinces voisines que l'élite de la noblesse avait péri dans cette fatale journée. L'infanterie beaucoup moins engagée dans le défilé, vit en tremblant la défaite des chevaliers qui passaient pour invincibles, et dont les escadrons effrayés se renversaient sur elle. Elle s'arrêta, voulut se retirer, et dans l'instant cette retraite devint une fuite honteuse. Sa perte fut assez peu considérable, mais les historiens de la nation ont conservé la mémoire de cinquante braves Zuriquois dont on trouva les rangs couchés morts sur la place. Léopold lui-même fut entrainé par la foule qui le portait du côté de Zug. On le vit entrer dans sa ville de Winterthur. La frayeur, la honte et l'indignation étaient encore peintes sur son front. Dès que la victoire se fut déclarée en faveur des Suisses, ils s'assemblèrent sur le champ de bataille, s'embrassèrent en versant des larmes d'allégresse, et remercièrent Dieu de la grace qu'il venait de leur faire, et qui ne leur avait coûté que quatorze de leurs compagnons."

His familiar letters and a number of essays, chiefly written in youth, form the remainder of the miscellaneous works. Of the letters, some have been quoted in this volume, and the reader can form his own judgment of them. Of the small essays we may say that they augment, if it is possible, one's notion of Gibbon's laborious diligence and thoroughness in the field of historic research, and confirm his title to the character of an intrepid student.

The lives of scholars are proverbially dull, and that of Gibbon is hardly an exception to the rule. In the case of historians, the protracted silent labour of preparation, followed by the conscientious exposition of knowledge acquired, into which the intrusion of the writer's personality rarely appears to advantage, combine to give prominence to the work achieved, and to throw into the background the author who achieves it. If indeed the historian, forsaking his high function and austere reserve, succumbs to the temptations that beset his path, and turns history into political pamphlet, poetic rhapsody, moral epigram, or garish melodrama, he may become conspicuous to a fault at the expense of his work. Gibbon avoided these seductions. If the *Decline and Fall* has no superior in historical literature, it is not solely in consequence of Gibbon's profound learning, wide survey, and masterly grasp of his subject. With wise discretion, he subordinated himself to his task. The life of Gibbon is the less interesting, but his work remains monumental and supreme

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